TO WHAT GREEN ALTAR?

by W. B. MAXWELL

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TO WHAT GREEN ALTAR?

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W. B. MAXWELL

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LIFE: A STUDY OF SELF

TO WHAT GREEN ALTAR?

By W. B. MAXWELL

"Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest . . ."

KEATS

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.
GARDEN CITY 1930 NEW YORK

336233

PRINTED AT THE *Country Life Press*, GARDEN CITY, N. Y., U. S. A.

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LEWISTON
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FIRST EDITION

TO WHAT GREEN ALTAR?

"MOTHER, do come away from the window. What are you doing?"

Old Mrs. Dacre was stationed near the big window of the drawing-room and her daughter, seated at the piano and occasionally striking a gentle chord, had watched the thin motionless parental back for a minute or two before she spoke. She repeated her question.

"Mum, what *are* you doing?"

"Only looking across the road," said Mrs. Dacre, without turning round. "The car is waiting for them. That must mean that he has recovered from his last bout and she's taking him for a drive. Dr. Forwood said he wasn't fit to be seen two days ago."

"Surely it doesn't concern us," said Miss Dacre, in a slow and sententious tone. "Really and truly, mother, I don't think you ought to allow those people to become an obsession."

Mrs. Dacre turned from the window and spoke irritably:

"Oh, Margaret, how I wish you weren't so priggish."

"Am I priggish, mother? I'm sorry if I am, but I suppose I can't help it. I don't mean to be." Miss Dacre showed signs of being wounded. She had risen from the piano and was moving towards the door. "But one must have principles—or some rule of thought to guide one."

"Where are you going?"

"Upstairs."

"Why?"

"To fetch something."

"Not sulky, are you? Sulkiness is the one thing I detest."

"I am never sulky," said Miss Dacre, in a quiet dignified voice.

"Then don't be magnanimous either. You said that as if you often have good and sufficient cause to be sulky, but rise superior, high above such human weakness. You forgive your persecutors."

"I don't think you're very kind this afternoon."

"I am not very well, darling," and Mrs. Dacre's manner and tone suddenly melted. "Dr. Forwood has let me down of late. I begin to doubt if he really understands my case."

"Oh, I wouldn't doubt him."

They were smiling at each other now affectionately.

Margaret Dacre hurried upstairs to her room. Its principal window was immediately above the one in the drawing-room. She went straight to it. She was just in time. Those people came out of the house opposite and entered their hired car.

The man moved slouchingly, as if shrugging his big shoulders in lazy defiance of decent tradition, of common propriety, of this large seaside place, of the whole universe. He looked dissolute, wicked, even at a distance. Yet there was something in his aspect that suggested a forfeited splendour rather than a normal degradation. He had a thick rough overcoat, such as smart young bloods used to affect, all loose, with vast folds, and his hat was of the Homburg style, turned down in front and worn rakishly, a little on one side. Always so different, his clothes, from the dress of the other males of Westmouth, careless and grand, no doubt made by a good London tailor, although shabby now, much the worse for wear—like the man himself—but still showing the fineness of their origin. He gave his hand to the yellow-haired woman as she got into the car, and then pulled her fur wrap about her neck before he took his seat beside her. They were too far off for their faces to be seen clearly; but Margaret knew what they were like.

Her own face went blank when the car drove away. It

was as if the curtain had fallen at the end of a play. The audience could leave the theatre. There was nothing more to see.

Yet she remained for a little while looking at the empty roadway. It was just such a road as one might find in a dozen other south-coast towns, designed for the most affluent residents of the place, wide and smooth, with little trees and large lamp-posts planted alternately; the houses themselves detached from one another, different in appearance but symmetrically placed so that each faced the house opposite, porch challenging porch, windows investigating windows—a road like a dull middle-class life, correct, straight, leading nowhere in particular. Of course, as everywhere else, there lay all round it chances, possibilities, dangers, immensities. The wind of the trackless sea blew through it often. Between the brick sides of the houses one caught a glimpse of the great swelling downs, open, unhedged, vast cloud shadows sweeping majestic across their sunlit expanse. Above the chimney-pots there was nothing but space, air, limitless height. It was a road from which one might start on a journey of high adventure—or in which one could quietly go to the devil, as the man opposite was doing.

There had been pleasurable excitement when these people arrived in Downside Avenue. Youngish, smartish, and as the house-agent declared, of a tip-top order, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Lane—as they were supposed to be—should prove a social acquisition to the neighbourhood. Everybody called upon them. Nobody, however, was admitted to their presence. Mr. and Mrs. Lane never returned any of the calls.

Then the scandal burst forth. They were not Mr. and Mrs. Lane at all. *He* was Mr. Lane, but she was not his wife and she did not even pretend to be. She was Mrs. Talbot—

or so she styled herself. She was living with Mr. Andrew Lane—as the more old-fashioned of their outraged neighbours did not hesitate to describe it—in open sin.

The first shock of the discovery over, there came a revulsion of feeling with a marked tendency to regard the whole affair more tolerantly. The less old-fashioned said that times are changed; things that were impossible a few years ago are nowadays quite ordinary. Mere unconventionalness is not necessarily to be labelled vice. Perhaps those people were waiting for somebody to divorce somebody and thus enable them to regularise their situation. Or they might be old friends, cousins, accustomed since childhood to dwell under the same roof, taking care of each other, keeping each other company in an entirely blameless manner. At any rate they had not sailed into Westmouth society under false colours. There had been no pretence of being better than they seemed. They had refused any interchange of visiting cards. They had intimated, almost as plainly as if they had said it, "We are pariahs and outcasts. If you don't mind, come on again. If you do mind, leave us alone."

Many considered their conduct in this one matter at least as decent and proper. Then during this first winter, when the woman fell ill, and the man was known to be in trouble with their servants, several responsible residents were tempted to stretch out a diffidently helping hand. The claims of charity hold good, however virtuous and high-principled you may be yourself. The gratification of a natural curiosity also no doubt had its allurement and mingled with the impulse towards a softer treatment. A restricted neighbourliness was suggested.

But Miss Dacre would not allow it. Margaret Dacre's attitude was undeviatingly severe. "It's no use," she said firmly. "You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled . . . and remember what Mrs. Meadows said. They ought not to have come here, and the sooner they go the better. Our

cue is not to make them comfortable but uncomfortable."

Margaret's attitude soon became the general attitude. Her firmness banished vacillation. She had nipped in the bud that growing flower of tolerant kindness and it did not sprout again. In her quiet way Miss Dacre was distinctly an influence—a greater influence outside the narrow circle of home than within the walls, but even there able sometimes to enforce her will against a will that was as a rule overwhelmingly more powerful than her own.

Miss Dacre had decided the fate, from a social point of view, of the intruders, and before the winter came to an end it was proved how very right she had been. For those two went from bad to worse. The woman, as everybody saw, was a wicked flashy worthless person. The man, although a gentleman in the beginning, had developed the lowest tastes. He made friends with sailors, fishermen, and all sorts of riff-raff, consorted with them, frequented their haunts. He drank heavily. Moreover he was subject to fits of violence. He had a fight in a bar parlour and was brought before the magistrates. Dr. Forwood, who had attended him professionally, saw him through the police court proceedings and afterwards narrated everything to everybody.

The illicit firm of Lake and Talbot were a disgrace. They had lowered the reputation of the road. They had even decreased the value of the property. The house-agent said so. He who had been taken at first by the man's swaggering lordly air and the woman's painted face, yellow hair, and impudently supercilious laugh, who had lauded them as tip-top high-class swells, now spoke of them as low-down dangerous people not fit to occupy lodgings on the sea front, much less a desirable residence in Downside Avenue.

Shafts of sunlight filled the staircase; the holland blind of a window flapped like the sail of a ship; Margaret going

down again had a vivid consciousness of the world outside the house. Flashing in familiar pictures she could see invisible things, the bright sea-front, the quaint old harbour and pier, the narrow up-and-down streets beyond the market square, the grass walks above the white chalk cliffs. This fine afternoon of late autumn seemed to clamour for recognition. It made its almost irresistible appeal not to be neglected, not to be wasted.

But when Margaret proposed a walk Mrs. Dacre considered that on the whole she would be better indoors.

"Don't bother about me," she said. "*You* go."

"Oh, no. I don't care to go without you."

"Darling," said Mrs. Dacre, repeating the complimentary form of address that she had already used once to-day. "You are very good to me. I never forget your sweetness, however fractious I may be. You do know that, don't you?"

"Of course I do," said Margaret, with warm affection.

They remained together then in the pleasantly-furnished room, the mother taking repose without sleep on a sofa, the daughter talking to her, reading to her, ministering to her comfort; and the afternoon was passing slowly away, as a thousand other afternoons had passed, eventless, empty, tiring instead of refreshing the mind with their blank tranquillity.

"Thank you, dear. I have closed my eyes, but I do not wish to have a nap. Sleeping in the day always jeopardises one's night's rest."

Mrs. Dacre enjoyed all the privileges of an invalid without any of the pains. For in fact she was not ill. On the other hand, a perplexing thing, she was not really well. Dr. Forwood, although often cheerily asserting that there was nothing whatever the matter with her, felt conscientiously justified in paying his innumerable visits and adding them together on the full scale for his annual bill. She had a heart that played tricks, there was a disposition to rheumatic

trouble, and her arteries were not perhaps as elastic as they might have been. Strong in the possession of these incipient disabilities, Mrs. Dacre exacted a ceaseless care from all about her during leisure hours, but would plunge gaily into unfettered action when on pleasure bent.

Before tea-time visitors arrived—first Mrs. Randall, an elderly widow, a bosom friend: then soon Leila Crane, a healthy game-playing girl; and on her heels stout good-natured Mrs. Purvis, the middle-aged wife of a clergyman.

Mrs. Randall, presently nodding her head in the direction of the roadway and smiling with gentle malice, asked for the latest news of "our interesting friends over the way."

"Oh, they are not to be mentioned," replied Mrs. Dacre. "Margaret has said they are a forbidden subject in this house."

"Really? Why did you say that, Margaret?"

"I said nothing of the sort"; and Margaret had a lofty air and a careless intonation. "I merely pointed out that we really need not trouble our minds about them. They are of no consequence."

"But you were the one who said it *was* of consequence from the very beginning"; and Mrs. Randall seemed puzzled. "You agreed with Mr. Sanderson about deteriorating the neighbourhood."

Miss Crane, closely followed by Mrs. Purvis, prevented any pursuit of the conversation.

Leila Crane, the youngest of several sisters, had something of a reputation as a local beauty. With her blue eyes, bold manner, and large smile, she attracted considerable notice; but so far she treated all her male admirers with benign contempt. She spoke of one of them at once.

"I told Jack Tracy he might come in to fetch me. I hope you don't mind."

"Mind! Of course not," said Mrs. Dacre. "Delighted to see Mr. Tracy."

"Thanks awfully," said Leila, and she glanced at Margaret Dacre, as if craving approval from her also.

In spite of her boldness Leila stood in awe of Miss Dacre. But indeed this was a feeling shared by many of Westmouth's young ladies. Miss Dacre was so very prim and correct. Her frocks were not too short, when seated her knees remained unseen; she did not smoke cigarettes in unsuitable hours or places; even at a ball supper half a glass of champagne was her limit; she politely refused to dance the Paul Jones and thus risk contact with unintroduced partners; calm and sedate, she betrayed no sign of excitement or emotion while the public eye was on her. They admired all this propriety of demeanour, although often mocking at it, and never by any chance emulating it. Miss Dacre's virtues made them secretly feel a little common and a little cheap. Moreover she carried the weight that is given by assured position and comparative wealth. Not truly rich, she was nevertheless so much richer than they. They knew that she spent a lot of money on her clothes—notwithstanding the lamentably ineffective results.

"I wish," said Mrs. Dacre with playful significance, "that you could teach your nice Mr. Tracy not to stammer."

"Yes, isn't he awful?" said Leila, benignly contemptuous; and seating herself beside Miss Dacre, she chattered about her devoted friend's affliction.

"When he first asked me to play golf with him he said 'You know I'm a big—big—big——' 'Big hitter,' I suggested. 'N—n—no, *beginner*.' That was what he was trying to say. It throws him into despair when he can't get the word out. 'My han-han-handicap is f-f-f-four——' 'Four?' I said hopefully. 'Well, I call that jolly good.' 'N-n-no.' He fell into despair and made noises like the waste-pipe of a bath. 'Four-and-twenty.' That was what he was trying to say."

Leila Crane laughed, and Miss Dacre responding with courteous smiles, she continued to prattle. But soon Miss Dacre ceased to listen. The group of elders were talking of Mr. Lane and his lady.

Genial Mrs. Purvis had begun to narrate an encounter with Mr. Lane at the esplanade drapery stores. She described her experience as "thrilling" and "upsetting."

"For one thing, it was so awkward—after all that fuss about the vicar returning his cheque—and he would naturally connect me with the church—although, of course, my husband had nothing to do with the vicar's decision. But he had followed me to the shop door, and there we were face to face. I just stared at him, much too nervous to speak. For another thing I was too *shocked*. I give you my word it made me feel quite creepy. When you see him right up against you like that, he does look such a blackguard."

"He *is* a blackguard," said Miss Dacre firmly, speaking from the other side of the room.

"Yes." Mrs. Purvis, turning, addressed the rest of the narrative to her. "But now a funny thing! He speaks like a gentleman. Yes—very much so. His voice is rather charming—at any rate it's what you expect from cultivated well-bred people. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'but I think this belongs to you . . .' My parasol! I had stupidly left it on the counter, and his lady had sent him after me with it. . . . I should have said that they were both there—in the lace department—they at one end of the counter and I at the other. . . . Of course I thanked him for his kindness. But now will you tell me what I am to do next time I bump up against him? Am I to bow, or smile, or give a half nod, or just cut him dead?"

Margaret Dacre did not make any ruling on the point.

Miss Crane demanded attention. She chattered about Mr. Lane's lady—that awful woman—the Talbot creature.

"Did you know that she sings? She sang at the fishermen's charity concert. Daddy was there, and he says she

sang jolly well. Daddy feels sure she must have been on the stage. . . . Oh, by the way, have you seen her photographs at Burnett's?"

No, Miss Dacre had not seen the photographs. What about them? She would be glad to hear.

The High Street photographer, as Leila now related, had almost filled his window with portraits of Mrs. Talbot. One, a greatly enlarged one, on an easel in the centre of the window, displayed her side view, with the head slightly turned towards you over her shoulder. According to Leila, she looked rather "taking" as thus presented.

"Cheeky, you know—provocative, what! Like an actress. Of course Burnett has done his best for her, touching it up, but all the same there are lines showing. I believe she's nearer forty than thirty. What makes her look so young and smart is her hair. Of course short hair always takes strokes off your handicap." Leila paused in embarrassment. "I know," she said apologetically, "that you and Mrs. Dacre don't approve of it—and I dare say you're right—strictly speaking. But what I mean is Mrs. T's isn't just shingled like mine and other people's. It's cropped absolutely close on her neck—and then the side bits left rather long—reminding you of an untidy boy . . ."

"Forgive me," said Margaret, interrupting the flow. "One moment."

Two neatly-dressed maid-servants had entered the room carrying tea-things, and with quiet unobtrusive deftness they began to make their preparations for the meal, moving tables, unfolding pretty cloths, depositing delicate china dishes full of small cakes, sandwiches, and sweetmeats. Everything was always so well done at the Dacres'. The two elders, while still talking to their hostess, observed the perfection of this sort of household drill.

Margaret spoke in subdued tones to one of the servants.

"Don't bring tea in at once. We are expecting Lady Rogers. Wait ten minutes."

Having issued this simple little order she gave a slight jump in her chair as if startled. Then she flushed, caught her breath, and coughed. From the roadway had come the blast of a motor-horn and the sound of wheels that drew to a standstill. The klaxon horn gave a couple more screeches. Those people had returned from their drive.

Miss Dacre glided out of the drawing-room and went upstairs.

Once more she stood at her window, watching with eager spellbound interest. Dusk was falling. The two figures seemed shadowy, vague, like fantastic symbolic personages in a primæval legend, the inventions of ignorant and superstitious minds to embody inexplicable feelings of wonder and awe. A third figure came from the suddenly-lighted entrance of the house—the servant for whom their horn had blown a summons. They gave her rugs and coats to carry. Then they stood side by side, the cruel, lascivious male and his common siren. They were talking to their hireling chauffeur. The woman laughed. Light, shrill, wicked, the laughter floated across the roadway. Then the man and the woman went into their mysterious unvisited house.

Margaret Dacre pulled down the three blinds of the bay window and turned on the electric light. She was warm, quivering, and a little out of breath, as though she had run upstairs too fast. Looking at herself in the glass on the toilet table, and seeing the dilated nostrils of her long nose, the red colour in her usually pale cheeks, the loose slack curves of a mouth that at ordinary times she could shut so firmly, she felt altogether upset or at least tottering from a well-established poise and balance. For a moment or two she had such a vague sensation of shame and personal abasement as might be experienced by a naturally self-respecting child who has pried on forbidden things, or listened hidden to the love talk of menials, or in secret read many pages of an obscene book.

She composed her face and smoothed her hair, staring at the reflection in the glass. She knew too well the verdict of her little world, and suffering under it, rebelling against its cruelty, nevertheless meekly accepted it as just. She was a person who ought to have been extremely good-looking, but somehow wasn't. Nice eyes, good features, satisfactory height, figure, carriage—these things did not count, were not worth pleading in mitigation of a lifelong punishment. Paleness or deficient colour, lack of animation, nothing "taking" about her! And, worst handicap of all, adding innumerable strokes on her game, the overwhelming shyness. Nobody guessed how shy she was. Nobody ever would guess. They all thought her hard. Even mother!

Already twenty-five years of age, she could now scarcely hope for any improvement in external aspect or for any change of inward qualities.

She stared at her hair and hated it—dull brown masses bound close to the poor encumbered head, and yet still bulky, like a useless unsightly bonnet, with trim rosettes over her ears like the ornaments worn by van horses. How often she had implored permission to get rid of this excrescent ugliness, this living incubus! Why might not she adopt the prevailing fashion, and give herself the advantage enjoyed by everybody else—including the loathsome woman over the way? But Mrs. Dacre said "No, no, no. . . . Never, never." She vowed that it was a disgusting fashion. . . . "Why should you want to disfigure yourself? Leave such tricks to housemaids and shop girls. . . . Besides, the best people don't do it." And with stern complacency the old lady showed Margaret, after searching the illustrated papers, a photograph of some middle-aged duchess or marchioness rich in chignon and curl. "Well-bred people," said Mrs. Dacre, "aren't swayed by the folly of an hour. Their dignity is precious to them. They preserve it."

Margaret went downstairs and poured out tea for the

guests. Leila Crane's tongue-tied admirer had arrived. He carried the cake plates to and fro. Then came Lady Rogers, big and fussy, large consort of a knighted manufacturer. Innocently fond of life and all that life gave her, Lady Rogers, although in the transition stage that will lead from comfortableness to sheer fat, took two or three lumps of sugar with each cup of tea.

"Three lumps," said Margaret Dacre tonelessly. "I had not forgotten. . . . And none for you, Mrs. Randall. . . . Won't you help yourself, Mr. Tracy? You are so kind waiting on everybody. . . . Ready for more, Leila?" Seated there, presiding at the round table, she looked soberly contented, a person exactly in her right place, the daughter of a well-found house who values the security and ease of her position, who derives calm pleasure from the light task of dispensing hospitality to a small circle of her mother's friends; but all the while she was preyed on by incongruous and disturbing thoughts. She wished the visitors at Jericho. The atmosphere of the charming room seemed to be suffocating and deadly. The room was a prisoner's cell, and all life was but a part of the prison. . . . "Mrs. Purvis, do try one of those biscuits. . . . Mr. Tracy, would you be so very kind?" Having said this she fell silent, merely smiling instead of using words. The others talked, and listening or pretending to listen, her face grew blanker and still blanker. Yet strangely it seemed now almost eloquent in its complete want of expressiveness.

The talk of the others flowed on—such a shallow trivial little stream, but inexhaustible, unceasing, able to fill the wide ocean with futility. Only matters of local interest were dealt with. The railway company had discontinued a very convenient Saturday evening train; Colonel Challoner had nearly killed Mrs. Arnold's dog, but it was the dog's fault; the Imperial Hotel had been choke-full for the last week-end, although here was October nearly over; somebody's niece had won twenty pounds in a cross-word

competition, and Mr. Warren's two girls were to appear in a *tableau vivant*. . . .

It was nearly seven o'clock before they had all gone.

After bidding good-night on the door-step to the last of them, Margaret went to the obscure cupboard behind the hall where the telephone was kept, out of sight and out of sound, in accordance with Mrs. Dacre's desire. Mrs. Dacre had trite maxims to say about the telephone and repeated them often. The telephone, she said, is either a blessing or an invention of the devil. . . . Like fire, it is a good servant but a bad master. . . . The great thing is to use it and not be bothered by it. . . . Margaret stood there, in semi-darkness, and waited throbbingly after asking for her number.

"Is that the hairdresser's? I am Miss Dacre, speaking from The Gables. . . . Oh, is that you, Monsieur Berger? Sorry to trouble you, for I know you must have shut up. But it's rather urgent. I want all my hair taken off. . . . Yes, right off. . . . Yes, the usual way. Can I come at eleven to-morrow morning? . . . Thank you so much. Eleven—sharp."

She was afraid to take off her hat at luncheon. Nervous, occasionally gasping as if unable to digest her food, now chattering foolishly, now reduced to an oppressive silence, she sat through what seemed an interminable repast until they two were left alone with their coffee. Then she plucked up courage and spoke.

"Mother, I hope you don't mind. I have had it done."

"Had what done?" asked Mrs. Dacre negligently.

Margaret took off her hat.

And the storm burst, more violently than any natural fears could have foreseen. Mrs. Dacre was very angry, and in her wrath she said hatefully unkind things. Words like blows followed words like stabs; she wounded, she buffeted, she pierced the heart of the defenceless sufferer.

"Oh, it isn't fair," cried Margaret, now in tears. "You say I'm dowdy, and when I do anything to improve myself and fall in with the fashion . . ."

"The fashion's over. If you must do it at all, you should have done it ages ago. It's too late—if you wanted to be fashionable. I've shown you the pictures. All the world is coming back to long hair. In London even the minxes and cinema girls and mannequins are growing their hair."

Margaret was terribly distressed.

"How cruel you are," she said, with a forlorn heart-aching bitterness. "Yes, this is always the way. If I want anything and you can't say it's unreasonable, you say *not now*. And then when I ask you again you say too late. The time has gone. It is always Not now or Too late."

"How dare you talk to me like that?"

An hour or two later Margaret humbly begged pardon for unfilial acts and utterances. She was forgiven. Indeed,

with the reconciliation completed, Mrs. Dacre showed a rather unusual tenderness and solicitude.

She said, handsomely, that there had only been a difference of opinion between them and now this was all over and would not be thought of again. But Margaret's action —and as if with an irrepressible flinching she averted her eyes from the results of the action—seemed to her as belonging to a state of affairs that she would confess had been making her a shade uneasy. It had seemed to her that of late her daughter was becoming restless, jumpy, not quite her dear steady self. And she gently asked questions. Had Margaret anything on her mind? Was she weary of Westmouth? Did she sometimes pine for foreign travel, a peep at the Metropolis, a brief plunge into amusement, gaiety, diversion of any kind?

Margaret, looking frightened once more, said in effect that she was perfectly happy, and wanting nothing.

Perhaps if one analysed Mrs. Dacre's character or strictly judged her conduct, one would be forced to class her with the large number of amiable but rather stupid people who are profoundly selfish. She possessed an unconscious yet perfect art of slave-making. She made slaves of faithful servants, of elderly women friends, of small shopkeepers, poor little dressmakers, jobbing gardeners, and other humble ministers to her comfort. She did it without knowing how she did it. Instinct seemed to guide her infallibly; so that in the early stages she bullied or cajoled, played upon the victim's feelings, was gay, cruel, indifferent, always at exactly the right moment. When her end was attained she displayed a smiling gratitude.

Margaret's father had been put through it all years ago, a younger but similar Mrs. Dacre taking almost everything and giving scarcely anything, robbing him soon of the charms and amenities that are looked for in a wife, yet

somehow controlling him so that he never once enjoyed the solace of infidelity with another woman; quietly thwarting him in all the lesser affairs of life as well as the big ones. Margaret remembered him as a dark silent man who moved slowly about their big London house and patted her on the head without speaking. Did he secretly revolt against Fate and the bad matrimonial bargain? He had gone to his rest in silence. He lay with all his secrets at Highgate Cemetery, a huge granite slab on top to prevent him from bursting out and telling Mrs. Dacre even at this late hour what he thought of her.

She mourned him, sent memorial notices to *The Times*, spoke of him with cordial approval—the best and kindest of husbands. She was grateful to her slaves. She always gave evidence of this redeeming quality, and occasionally, as in regard to Margaret, had qualms of conscience.

Margaret's servitude, the more remarkable in consideration of her age and the fact that she possessed independent means, was voluntary. Deep affection, trustfulness, anxiety, together with the diffidences and inhibitions that precluded her from finding any outlet for emotion in close friendship with other girls, had formed the manacles and yoke which she accepted so meekly. Nowadays their quarrels scarcely deserved the name; although it had not always been thus. Between her eighteenth and twenty-first birthdays Margaret had put up some good fights, with accompaniment of stormy weeping, locked doors, fierce wild trampings over the downs and along far-off lanes. But Mrs. Dacre was waiting for her at home. She had to go home. Sooner or later Mrs. Dacre defeated her with the sickroom atmosphere and tacit but none the less poignant appeals to her love, compassion, native generosity. Rendered weaponless by fear, Margaret would hurry out of the house and run to Dr. Forwood's surgery. "Oh, Dr. Forwood, do please come at once. Just now mother turned as white as a sheet, and clutched at her chest as

though she couldn't breathe. I believe she's going to have an awful heart attack. . . ." "Oh, no," said sensible Dr. Forwood. "You two ladies play upon each other's nerves. You shouldn't do it. There's nothing the matter with your mother. That is—you know what I mean. . . . But of course I'll come. Give me half a minute."

The same qualm that had led to those solicitous maternal questions made Mrs. Dacre talk confidentially to the closest of all her friends, Mrs. Randall.

"I should blame myself," she said, "if I ever stood in Margaret's way. I have told her so. I would face a separation just as other mothers have to. . . . You know, of course, that, from the financial point of view, this is a joint household. She and I pool our resources;" and Mrs. Dacre glanced round the room, as though summing up all the comfort and charm of the dually supported nest.

Old Mrs. Randall knew all about that. Each lady's money was her very own. The mother had more than the daughter; but putting the two lots together they provided a substantial income that nevertheless escaped any serious claim to super-tax. Very convenient.

"Several times of late," said Mrs. Dacre, "I have thought that Margaret ought to marry."

"But I don't think she ever will."

"Why not?"

"Don't be offended. I am very fond of Margaret. I admire her many good qualities. She is a *dear* girl. But I don't believe she ever gives men a thought—or they her. Like so many young women of the present day she seems altogether devoid of sex feeling. Excuse a not very elegant expression. . . . No sentimental side. No romance—all matter-of-fact. And you don't win hearts that way, do you? . . . But, tell me, what has brought these things into your mind?"

"Well, only Mr. Warren. He pays her increasing attention."

"Does he really? Mr. Warren!"

This Mr. Warren was a gentle soft kind of man, aged fifty. Possessed of considerable means, indeed opulent when measured by Westmouth standards, he lived at Appleton House, a large red brick building situated outside the town on the London Road, with gardens, conservatories, small meadows, cowsheds, and all such other countrified attributes as precluded the ugly name of villa and entitled its owner to describe it as a "little place." He had now been a widower for several years.

Margaret Dacre knew his wife well and was sweet to her. Mr. Warren always said so. "Very sweet. One of her dearest friends." To console him in his widowhood he had two uninteresting little girls, who were growing up fast. . . . "They adore you," he used to say to Margaret.

"Oh, no, don't you believe it," said Miss Dacre, assuming the sprightly manner that she had found valuable in keeping Mr. Warren at a safe distance. "They like coming to tea here because it's a change for them. Everybody likes a change, and it's the one thing so impossible to get;" and, unexpectedly to herself, she sighed, and for a moment or two her face became void and dull. Then she flushed and spoke rapidly. "But I dare say we oughtn't to want it—and probably it wouldn't be good for us."

"Motherless chicks!" said Mr. Warren. He had not noticed the alteration in her manner. He was one of those unfortunate people who fail as conversationalists because they are so much engrossed with their own side that they cannot attend to what their companions are saying. Even as a suitor he too often ignored the wooed object. "I do all I can for them, but it is pitifully insufficient. No mere man could replace what they have been deprived of—

what they, poor pets, would so keenly desire to see replaced."

"Oh, I'm sure you do them proud," said Margaret, very sprightly and nervous. "Good-bye, Mr. Warren. I must fly."

And now, about noon on a crisp bright day, Mr. Warren was downstairs in the drawing-room. Elderly Mead, the faithful maid-housekeeper, came up to tell her younger mistress.

"Mrs. Dacre asked would you please go down as soon as you can."

"Bother," said Margaret. "All right, Mead."

Because the room seemed rather cold without a fire she had put on a warm tweed coat over her red and gold jumper, and was passing the time agreeably enough in strenuous tidying of her never really untidy writing bureau. She discarded the overcoat, washed her hands, hung a string of yellow beads round her neck, and lightly stroked the firm waves of her reduced hair. Going to the door she paused before the big cheval glass and, standing with the palms of her hands pressed downward on her hips in a well-known attitude of mannequins, she gave a bitter little laugh. She had had the cruel and almost sickening thought that there was one person on this wide earth in whose eyes she might appear rather "taking." And that person, as she understood, was now sitting down below maundering idiotically to her mother.

But she was not altogether correct in this surmise. For she found Mr. Warren alone in the drawing-room.

"Ah, yes, I had been prepared," he said, staring at the shingled head and holding her hand until she drew it away. "You need not fear that I shall range myself with those who censure. *Very* nice. Be-witch-ing!"

Then it was delivered—the definite proposal. She re-

fused it in appropriate terms, and with a prim sort of distress or perturbation that was almost Victorian in its unmodernness. She must not entertain the flattering idea. She could not leave her mother.

"But need that be? Your mother and I are good friends. I have an immense regard for her, and I venture to think she——"

"Oh, yes," said Margaret, fingering the string of beads. "Of course mother likes you. It isn't that."

"Well, then;" and he suggested that they could get round the difficulty by all living together.

"Do you mean you would come to live with us?"

But he did not mean that—Appleton being so much larger, with garden, direct view of the ocean, and so forth.

"Oh, I'm afraid mother wouldn't care to leave her own house."

He said, however, that obstacles which seem large at first can always be surmounted. "Where there's a will there's a way."

"I'm afraid in this case there isn't any way."

"Or," he said sadly, "there isn't any will?"

"No," she said abruptly, "I'd better confess it. There isn't. I'm sorry, Mr. Warren, but it isn't my fault. I *have* tried to make you see—all along."

"Don't say any more. At least not now. Time may help me."

"No," she said earnestly. "Time won't make any difference. Please do not waste another thought on me."

"Well?" said Mrs. Dacre, after he had sadly withdrawn.

"The answer was in the negative."

"I will not interfere, Margaret. It is your business. If the advantages do not weigh——"

"Mummy, mummy——" and Margaret laughed ruefully— "are you so desperately anxious to be rid of me

that you would willingly condemn me to such a fate? Mr. Warren! Ye gods."

"My dearest Margaret, it was but for your sake. I have been working myself up to a sacrifice;" and again she glanced round fondly at the pretty chintz covers on the chairs, the deep and capacious sofas, the tiled hearth bright with reflections of darting flames, the comfort, the grace, the beauty of the home background. "A supreme sacrifice. I am only too glad if not called upon to make it."

On the next few occasions when Margaret saw him, Mr. Warren had clothed himself in mawkish dignity. He appeared to be endeavouring to show her that he felt more hurt than angry. Then he returned to the charge.

This occurred in the course of a subscription dance at the Imperial Hotel. She had not intended to go to it; but amiable Lady Rogers insisted on taking her there.

In the hotel cloak-room Lady Rogers praised her aspect. She was wearing a new and expensive frock of bright crimson, and had believed in its effectiveness until she put it on to-night. But neither the compliments of Lady Rogers nor the "hearty congrats" offered by Leila Crane could reassure her or give her the least confidence. She felt painfully shy and awkward at this first public parade of her shingling.

"Come along," said Lady Rogers cheerfully, "and let's enjoy every minute till we're swept out with the crumbs. There are three new young men that I want to introduce to you before they're snapped up."

Young men, whether visitors to Westmouth or inhabitants, danced once with Margaret but rarely a second time.

"Cyril. . . . Geoff. . . . Tom," said local mothers to their male offspring. "There's Miss Dacre sitting it out. Do give her another turn." But the ungracious youths said one turn was enough. They said she was lumpish, affected,

stuck-up, wanting to queen it over everybody—"and without the goods, without the goods."

Margaret herself knew that she was not being a success, and the knowledge made her shyer and stiffer. She hated Mr. Warren for the manner in which his rather prominent pale blue eyes followed her movements, or rested on her, when she was seated, with a jelly-like persistency. Mr. Warren did not dance. He stood annoyingly in doorways, and if shifted leaned against walls. Looking at him and quickly looking away from him, she thought of the amazing varieties of man when merely considered as a genus of the animal kingdom—big, small, of all sizes; tame dull ones, full of pretences and timidities; wild fierce ones, reckless of consequences, rough, violent, terrifying.

"A little nourishment after so much exercise! As a very old friend I claim the privilege of taking you in to supper."

Nobody else had asked her. She was forced to follow him to the supper-room. It was bright and gay in there and very noisy, all the young people laughing, ragging, throwing about coloured balloons that were handed round by the management; but Mr. Warren and Miss Dacre, sitting at a small table in the corner, were completely out of the fun.

"What a treat," said Mr. Warren, "to have you all to myself, if only for half an hour." Then he ate and drank. "They say that onlookers see most of the game, and I can assure you that onlookers get uncommonly hungry if they look on long enough."

Margaret was upset—unreasonably so. For what did it matter? Underbred donkey. She escaped from him as soon as possible, sought her fur cloak, came back to the supper-room and said good-night to Lady Rogers, who was busily supping for the third or fourth time.

"Oh, no? When it isn't half over. . . . Anyhow, take my car, dear."

Instead of using her friend's car she walked home. The

night was fair but cold. She wrapped the fur closely round her and walked slowly, thinking. Turning a corner into Downside Avenue she thought of the house opposite.

It was past one, nearly two o'clock. But lights were showing on the ground floor. He was still up—drinking perhaps in solitude, or both of them together very likely. Their bedroom of course was above, and no light came from the upper floor.

Before getting into bed she went to the window and looked out. It was all dark over there.

"WELL," said Mrs. Dacre, "*one* mystery is cleared up anyhow. Why they came here! I never could understand the reason myself. But it appears that he *inherited* the house. It was somehow left to him through old Miss What-was-her-name. Yes, the house and its contents. Then all that time while it stood empty, with Mrs. Cairns as caretaker in charge, the furniture was stored at Milford's—and only brought back when he decided to do it up and occupy it. Mr. Sanderson, although he talked so big, was nothing whatever in the affair—except that he had been given the order for the redecoration, and supervised the work."

"Who told you all this, mummy?"

"Mr. Sanderson's clerk."

If Margaret ever really put a ban on the subject she had herself lifted it. She often talked of both those people, reporting to her mother how she met one or other of them or the two together. Such meetings were frequent.

Once it was at the circulating library. They were both there. The woman after changing her books stood at the table and talked to the manageress. The man sat by a window, motionless, sullenly waiting, with the collar of his rough overcoat turned up, his profile dark against the light from the window, his untidy hair looking black. The woman had a sharp, thin face, heavily powdered, with the lips brightly reddened, and Margaret, sedately walking round the shelves, heard her give a slight laugh. She believed that the woman had been observing her and then had spoken about her to the manageress, either asking a rude question or making a disparaging remark.

She had the same fancy or surmise when she met them in their own road. To avoid passing close she went to the

other pavement, walking slantingly across the road. She never looked their way, but believed that they watched and spoke about her.

Next time he was alone, coming towards her in Pier Street. She went on, not with averted eyes, but keeping them raised so that she saw the cornices of the houses. She did not bring them down for some time after he must have gone by.

There was one meeting, however, of which she gave no report. She herself knew that it was a strange omission on her part. But the incident would have been a little difficult to explain. Perhaps it remained inexplicable to herself.

It occurred down by the harbour. This was a haunt of his. Down there he was among the roughs that he had made companions. He drank with them. One could see him coming out of the low quay-side taverns, among the fishermen and fish carriers. He would stand, too, in the doorways of the marine stores, talking over his shoulder to the people inside. It was said that sometimes he went out in the fishing smacks and stayed away for two or three nights. There, near the steps leading up to the stone pier, Margaret saw him, sauntering, slouching, hat cocked, and hands plunged deep in the pockets of the sort of leather coat that is worn by chauffeurs or engineers. At sight of him suddenly so close to her she felt a violent internal trouble—a kind of quailing—as if the strangeness of her thoughts had produced a bodily reflection. While he slowly advanced she pretended to be looking about her. And then as he came up she spoke to him. She asked if he happened to know of a shop—the name, Rankins, she thought—where they sold fishing tackle and tarpaulins. She did this as though he were a total stranger, and she a person unacquainted with the locality. He told her yes, the shop was on the quay. It was only a few doors away. She said something else, and he spoke again.

Her eyes were on him now. He was a man terribly run

to seed—that must be a universal verdict. Fleshiness, looseness, lack of outlines, where all should have been firm and clearly cut. Yet still a certain handsomeness. He reminded her of a cinema actor. The sort of man who plays the chief character in one of those Lost Legion films; exiled from his proper world, degraded, the reproved of mankind, yet redeeming himself by a final heroic action; reaching the apotheosis that good film-goers have expected—a fallen angel who rises again.

Mrs. Purvis had not exaggerated. His voice had the intonation of an educated person. His manner was entirely that of a gentleman. He took off his hat and went on.

One frequently has an illusion in regard to public men, such as prime ministers, war chiefs, revolutionary leaders, and so forth, that one knows them personally as well as by reputation. So much is said about them from day to day and even from hour to hour. Their portraits meet one's eyes whenever one opens a newspaper. One is made to watch their movements, to follow their plans, to interpret their thoughts. One cannot get away from them. And thus it may happen that in moments of reverie their recalled images are so solid and real that they make all other pictures seem flat and unsubstantial. They are people of three dimensions even in memory; whereas, with the rest, life and bodily presence are needed to create substance, convexity, and strong colour.

In a lesser degree, it was so with Mr. Andrew Lane at Westmouth. One was always being given him from different points of view. Everybody talked about him. One heard what the vicar said, what the curate said, what the club secretary said, what the retired colonels, admirals, and city men, who together with their wives composed

the superior part of the population, said on the engrossing subject. But up and down the social scale the whole place expressed its opinions or recorded its impressions. Naturally the household staff of The Gables gossiped without cessation about the house opposite; and Mead, the Dacres' factotum, retailed much of this chatter to her employers. "All last week," said Mead, "there was only Mrs. Cairns over there, and she had to do for them as best she could. They can't keep a decent servant in the place, and you needn't be surprised, ma'am, the way they go on. . . . Mrs. Cairns says it's not so bad between-while, but when he breaks out it's too dreadful." Tradesmen's messengers carried tales also. The tradesmen themselves talked of him to Miss Dacre because they were all aware that The Gables suffered under his immediate proximity. "We had Mr. Lane in here two days ago," said Edwards, the linendraper. "Swaggered round and round he did, and talking to us all as if we were so much dirt for not sending Mrs. Talbot's parcel prompt enough. That was our crime, miss. Put in at their door at three p.m. instead of two as she'd asked. . . ." Sometimes but rarely there was a gleam of light in the darkness of these stories.

For instance, the tale of Winter, the newsagent and stationer, had a happy ending. Mr. Lane in a fury had raved and cursed at Winter's messenger about the bad delivery of newspapers, terrifying the poor chap so that he was afraid to deliver newspapers at all. Then Mr. Lane had come down to Winter's and made a shindy there. He abused the girl in charge, he swore at everybody, until Winter seriously thought of sending for the police. But later Mr. Lane returned and "jollied" them all, laughing, saying hard words broke no bones, his bark was worse than his bite, and that sort of thing, and at last giving the insulted young woman half a sovereign to buy a lip-stick or a box of chocolates, whichever she preferred. It was closing time, but instead of going he sat on the counter chatting

and yarning with Winter while the others put up the shutters and bolted the shop door. "Mind you, miss, nobody nicer when he chooses to remember himself. And *comic!* He soon set me on the laugh;" and Winter laughed at the recollection.

These varied streams of information were always flowing for the Dacres, but the source of all really intimate knowledge was Dr. Forwood.

Everyone talked openly to Dr. Forwood. All the world esteemed him and told him secrets. He was so safe. Not quite sixty, genial, kindly, skilful to a limited extent, he had the air of an easy-going bachelor and it was understood that he would not marry again. It was a case of a relapse to bachelor habits; for he had been twice married and twice a widower. He had lost both wives. "I've been unlucky." This was his own expression. "Yes, I lost them both." He said it as one speaks of luggage, and as if aware that it was such bad luck as almost to suggest carelessness. Really not to be trusted with wives. If he got another he might lose her too.

He had become friends with the house of disrepute. He visited the female pariah professionally and the male outcast as a pal. He believed that his influence, as far as it went, was good. He would drop in there of an evening for a smoke and a talk with Lane, and they would often sit together, after the lady had gone to bed, till quite a late hour, not playing cards, just talking.

"I wanted to get him to talk and I'm succeeding," said Dr. Forwood. "He was altogether too silent. It's a bad symptom in a case like his."

"Ah!" Mrs. Dacre sighed and then smiled. "As somebody was made to ask in *Punch*—such a funny drawing—What is his particular poison?"

"Brandy."

"And is he at it all the time?"

"Yes, and no," said Dr. Forwood. "He regularly takes

too much, and then at intervals he takes it to excess. Oh, if he hadn't had a fine physique and naturally splendid constitution, it would have played him up long ago. . . . But, you understand, there's no tippling when *I'm* there—not for either of them."

Dr. Forwood also said that Lane had never given him any of his nonsense. The swagger, the hectoring air, the bad language, were laid aside in honour of the guest. Lane never failed to control himself and preserve the decencies as a host.

"But he has blackguarded *her* in my presence on more than one occasion. Last time I pulled him up short. He took the rebuke——" and Dr. Forwood in his turn smiled. "He took it, but he glared as if he wanted to act the tiger of the jungle and tear me to pieces. . . . I dare say I might have saved myself the trouble. She's able to take her own part."

From Dr. Forwood they had heard about the furniture as well as the disposition of the rooms. The room to the right of the hall was the dining-room; the room to the left was the drawing-room, with a third room behind it. On the doctor's advice Mrs. Talbot's bedroom had been changed from the front of the house to the back, in order that she might have the advantage of the afternoon sun. Both upstairs and downstairs you saw the sort of heavy cumbrous things that furnishers used to supply to well-to-do customers sixty years ago—mahogany, walnut wood, gilding, straight-backed chairs with red seats, sofas covered in damask, vast sideboards, tall glass-fronted cabinets, and so on.

"He didn't buy a stick of it himself. The lot came to him by will."

"So we have understood," said Mrs. Dacre.

During those protracted conversations the two men sat in the dining-room. The lady would be a longish time alone in the drawing-room, reading, or softly playing the piano,

or singing to herself in a subdued voice so as not to disturb anybody, or amusing herself with a game of patience, and——

"She plays patience?" Mrs. Dacre interrupted. "Exactly what I do myself nearly every night. Fancy! Well, there she and I meet on common ground. One touch of nature makes the whole world kin, does it not?"

"Mother, Dr. Forwood was meaning to tell us some more. . . . Why does he leave her alone like that? Is he bored with her?"

"Oh, no. She joins us after a bit; and, believe me, she is often very good company. She doesn't mind what she says—or does either. She has a trick with that pretty yellow hair of hers, when she——"

"It's dyed, of course, her hair," said Margaret, herself interrupting after reproving the fault in another.

Dr. Forwood smiled again. "My dear Miss Margaret, there are secrets—especially of the toilet—which even we doctors never pry into;" and he related how the woman would pull the light-coloured tresses over her eyes and then make them flop up and down by blowing out air from her mouth. She did this to signify contempt, disagreement with an argument, or merely for fun.

"A queer notion of fun," said Margaret, with frigid hardness. "It sounds to me supremely silly."

Silly or not, this touch, added to many others in the doctor's description of life across the way, helped to conjure up a very definite picture—the room with the ugly sideboard, and Lane, who never dressed for dinner, in an old brown suit, lounging big and slovenly, or shuffling morocco slippers as he moved to and fro; the woman, who, as Dr. Forwood said, was often grandly attired of an evening, bright in satin or velvet, leaning her thin bare arms on the table, fooling with her tinted hair, covering and uncovering her painted face, and then no doubt laughing shrilly. She would rise, stretch her lithe body, and take

leave of the guest—addressing perhaps a few words of shameless implication to her paramour. "Good-night, Andrew. Don't wake me when you come up." . . . "All right, old thing," Andrew would say carelessly; and then "Oh, damn. You might have shut the door after you."

As Mrs. and Miss Dacre listened, one of them at least could imagine everything as clearly as if she had been actually there, seeing and hearing all that their old friend spoke of.

Time passed. In the early summer Mrs. Dacre went to Bath, with her daughter and her maid accompanying her and taking care of her. After dinner on the evening of their return, when Mead brought Mrs. Dacre's tonic mixture to the drawing-room the faithful creature lingered portentously. She was big with news.

"Fine goings-on over the way during our absence, ma'am."

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Dacre encouragingly.

"Yes, indeed ma'am." Then Mead told how, according to the cook and the other maids, a series of disturbing events had culminated in a frightful row "between the parties." "Mr. Lane was shouting out of the window. Such language as you never heard—with Mrs. Talbot answering back, 'paying him in his own coin,' as Amy says."

"A regular slanging match?"

"That's it, ma'am."

"Sit down, Mead."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Did Amy and the girls hear exactly what was said?"

"That they did," Mead replied with gusto. "The whole

road could have heard." It was all second-hand from Mead, but she gave it with the force of a direct witness; and the intense respectability of her appearance, the grey hair, the neat white collar, the black silk apron, seemed, as contrastive to the matter dealt with, to heighten the effect of this new tale of shame and degradation. "She had run out of the house and he was shouting to her from the window over the porch. 'Ena, Ena,' he kept shouting, 'come indoors this minute.' But she wouldn't. So then he sends her to the wicked place. . . . I will not mention the word. . . . Oh, very well, ma'am. He sends her to hell. '*You may go to hell.*' But she had her answer ready. 'I know I may,' she screamed, 'and without your permission. And what's more I'm not afraid of hell and shouldn't be if I wasn't sure I'd meet you there.'"

"Margaret, do you hear? Was there ever anything like it?"

"It is truly a disgrace, ma'am. Amy and the rest all say it made *them* feel ashamed to think that a lady and gentleman——" But the narrative was too exciting for philosophic digressions. Mead continued briskly: "She went off *up* the road, *without* her hat, and they think she went through the footpath to the fields. After a while my lord—that's what Amy calls him—my lord comes out and goes *down* the road. . . . An hour afterwards, *if* you please, my lady comes out of the house in her hat and coat, and lugging a suit-case along to the front gate. . . . They think she must have gone round by the fields and let herself in at the back. But Amy says it gave her quite a turn, seeing her come out of the house like that when they thought she wasn't there. But there it was. She stood by the gate waiting until a taxi-cab arrives—and then off she went. She must have 'phoned for the taxi from inside the house. And she was gone while he was still out. . . . Next day *he* went. And Amy believes—and truly, ma'am, I believe it myself—he didn't know no more than the dead where

she'd gone. She'd given him the slip and bolted from him, and he had to go and look for her—in London, I suppose. Well, ma'am, he found her—or she surrendered to her bail, as Amy says—for they came back together a week ago to-day. And now she's ill in bed. Dr. Forwood is at the house almost every morning."

When she reappeared it was in a bath-chair with Lane walking beside her. In spite of the warm summer weather she was closely wrapped with rugs and shawls. After several excursions in the bath-chair she began to walk out again, generally with Lane in attendance.

One gathered that the illness of his companion had steadied him. When one saw him by himself he was moving fairly fast, carrying himself better too, as if determined to abandon the old slouching gait. But then soon he had a long drinking bout, remaining invisible for many days and emerging at last at night, a wreck, shattered, devastated. Margaret saw him from her window as he passed beneath the nearest lamp-post, a dark stooping figure, something to frighten servant-girls as they hurried with letters to the pillar-box and make police-constables stare after him meditatively.

"I have warned him," said Dr. Forwood solemnly, "both on his own account and hers. If he doesn't pull up now I can't answer for the consequences."

In the middle of a summer morning, after she had fetched a new book from the circulating library, Margaret set out for a long walk. It was as though she had felt a sudden need to escape from the streets and the people, the noise, the stupidity, the factitious joyfulness of the tourist

crowd as well as the unavoidable greetings and brief parleys of those deadly respectable and correctly-mannered residents with whom she was acquainted. "If I'm late for lunch," she thought, "I can't help it."

She walked fast until she had shaken off the outskirts of the town, gas works, railway embankment, cricket and football ground, workmen's dwellings built by municipal authority, with steam-rollers labouring on the rugged surface of new roads, that fringe of familiar ugliness which seems inevitable on the landward side of every prosperous sea-coast place. Then she slackened her pace to a steady tramp, and this she maintained for a couple of miles or more. She was marching firmly along a white and dust-laden road when Dr. Forwood in his busy little car overtook her.

He stopped the car and offered her a lift.

"I was taking a walk," she said hesitatingly.

"So I see," said the doctor genially. "But I should think you have taken the walk by now."

Miss Dacre looked about her and still hesitated, while an amusing thought passed through Dr. Forwood's mind. She was such a very prim and demure young lady that perhaps she felt it would not be decorous to drive unchaperoned even with so elderly and trustworthy a male as himself.

But Miss Dacre was only weighing the annoyance of renouncing her walk against the advantage of not getting any hotter. She could feel perspiration on her forehead and symptoms of approaching clamminess in her garments. There had been a cool breeze on the sea-front; but here the sheltered valley was airless, with the fields drenched in heavy sunshine, giving off stored heat from their cracking surfaces. Even the cattle had stopped moving. They stood in apathetic clusters beneath the shade of hedgerow trees.

"Where are you bound for?" she asked.

Dr. Forwood was going to a pretty little village on the far side of the downs. He begged Miss Dacre to accompany him. He could drop her at any point she might choose on the homeward journey.

"Yes," she said, with the abruptness that seemed to be growing into a habit, "I'd like to. . . . And I have been rather wanting to have a little talk."

She seated herself in the car beside him, and soon they were spinning up the long slopes towards the open country. Dr. Forwood drove well, and was able to talk without any failure in attention to his road or his wheel, but Miss Dacre did not start a conversation. He glanced down at the volume that she had laid on her knees, and asked what it was.

She held up the book so that he could see the title.

"*A Woman in Unknown Borneo!* Hullo!" And he laughed. "That's a queer line for our Miss Stay-at-Home. . . . Does that sort of thing interest you?"

"Yes. I like travels—and adventures—books about exploring and all that. They are life, aren't they? And novels are only an imitation of life. They bore me."

"I quite agree. Novels!" And Dr. Forwood made a wry face. "Rubbish I call them. *I* don't read one from year's end to year's end."

"I like to take myself out of myself," said Miss Dacre sententiously. "For that purpose I read all sorts of books. Lately I have been reading about the housing problem—and about alcoholism."

"Alcoholism!"

"Yes. That's what I wanted to speak of."

Then she asked Dr. Forwood his opinion as to the possibility of cure for those addicted to the vice. One book written by a medical man said it was wrong to take a hopeless view in regard even to confirmed drunkards. Labouring men who had sunk very low, to the ruin of their wives and families, sometimes—so the book said—became re-

formed characters, rose from the abyss into which they had fallen, and were model husbands and fathers. According to this writer, there was always a chance of restoration to health and decent habits, if you could cut off the source of evil. For instance, even when anybody had gone as far as in the case of Mr. Lane, he should not really be incurable. She wished that Dr. Forwood would tell her what he thought.

"Are we," asked Dr. Forwood, for a moment turning his head and smiling at her, "to treat of Lane's case, or is it to be an academic discussion?"

"Can't it be both? . . . Don't laugh at me. I truly am interested. You know, I do a lot of visiting among poor people."

"Yes, I know you do. Splendid of you. Mr. Pole always says so."

"And I meet drunkenness—and see its effects. . . . Then I thought if poor people have the chance, why not Mr. Lane?"

Dr. Forwood gave her his considered view. Poor people would have a better chance simply because they were poor. It would be easier to deprive them of stimulants. When out of work, the drink was knocked off automatically. They couldn't get it—at any rate not in large quantities. But well-to-do people always had money with which to go on destroying themselves. Idle people, like Lane, were their own masters. How could you influence or control them? The treatment for such a case implied the power of control. It would be complete abstention from the use of alcohol; mental occupation; change of scene, of custom, of everything; restoration to health by gradual exercise, and then hard work—the more hard work the better. No, on the whole, and he hated saying it, he thought that in Lane's case nothing short of a miracle would do the trick.

"Another book I read spoke of *shock*. It said that some-

times after a great shock an entirely new condition was set up in the patient's mind—and they voluntarily renounce the habit."

"Yes, no doubt that's true. But what's going to shock Lane? He's much more likely to shock everybody else;" and Dr. Forwood laughed good-humouredly.

"It seems to me very sad—not to be able to do anything."

"It *is* sad," Dr. Forwood said, with kindly sympathy. "I'd be only too glad to help them—both of them. I *am* doing all I can. But there you are. I think they're beyond help. . . . You asked for my real opinion and I've given it to you—quite in confidence."

"Oh, quite," said Miss Dacre.

She sat in the car outside the gate of a farmhouse, and while the doctor visited a bedridden old woman she read of the strong active fearless woman in unknown Borneo facing hardship, fatigue, captivity, and not sufficiently sudden death, since torture would precede it.

She allowed the doctor to drive her all the way home, and so was just in time for luncheon.

Not long after this Dr. Forwood told them that he had ceased to visit Lane's house except professionally, and then only because a sense of duty compelled him. Mr. Lane had become impossible. "I liked him, you know. Honestly I was getting to enjoy our talks. But there *are* limits;" and Dr. Forwood shook his head as if alluding to insupportable matters.

Possibly because he missed these after-dinner conversations, he once or twice paid an evening call on Mrs. and Miss Dacre. The ladies were pleased to see him. They welcomed him charmingly and thanked him for coming.

He kept them up-to-date in the history of their opposite

neighbour. Lane, it seemed, had now formed an alliance with a notorious bad character, one Dick Roper, a sailorman who had served a term of imprisonment for using a knife to a brother salt in a forecastle quarrel. This unemployed rascal had been hanging about the harbour for months until engaged by Lane to help with a newly purchased or hired sailing boat. It was quite a small boat, and he and his new skipper sailed it at all hours and in all weathers. They were simply asking to get drowned.

"I think I saw it," said Miss Dacre. "Late in the afternoon. It made me wonder—to go out like that, at dusk."

Another evening he told them dreadful things in regard to the woman, Mrs. Talbot. He was certain that Lane sometimes knocked her about.

"No?" said Mrs. Dacre.

"Yes. . . . She carries bruises that can't be accounted for any other way."

"The brute," said Margaret, drawing in her breath.

Dr. Forwood described what he supposed must have occurred and how the woman had been knocked down. "I don't mean that he hit her with his fist—but perhaps wanted to smack her head and hit harder than he intended, and over she went. Perhaps she was drunk, too."

Nor was this all. For after a little while the doctor spoke of marks on her body, marks that she couldn't explain. He had seen them, because it had been necessary to make an examination for another reason. "No, she wouldn't tell me how they came there."

"Oh, spare us details," said Margaret in a faint voice.

But he went on to say he felt sure that Lane in one of his furies had thrashed the woman with a riding-whip.

"This surpasses everything," said Mrs. Dacre.

Margaret could not speak. In the extremity of her trouble she had risen from her chair, and moving to the hearth she stood there with a hand grasping the chimney ledge as though she clung for support to something un-

shakable and unalterable while everything else changed or lost substance. The doctor's words had produced an abject collapse of her ordered and well-governed thoughts. She felt again that strange quailing of the mind as well as the body. It was as if her very soul had fallen sick and faint. Horror, disgust, shame overwhelmed her.

Finally recovering composure—and neither of the others had observed the loss of it—she was able to resume her part in the conversation.

"Why," she asked, "if he is not fond of her, does he go on staying with her?"

"But he *is* fond of her," said Dr. Forwood. "He couldn't possibly do without her. If anything happened to her he would simply go out of his mind."

"I cannot understand it," said Miss Dacre, in measured tones, with a stiff and unsympathetic air. "Affection should surely restrain even such passions as his. How can he treat her in so hateful a way?"

"Jealous! Between you and me and the post," said Dr. Forwood, completing his disclosures, "I believe that jealousy is at the root of it. She still plays the fool with other men—or is ready to if he gave her the opportunity. He knows this and he can't get away from it."

Time crept by. Margaret was twenty-six. Next year she would be twenty-seven. Time passed, yet life made no progress. Everything in it remained stationary—except across the road, where the pace of a downhill journey was accelerating.

Outwardly Miss Dacre's hardness had become accentuated. She talked more sententiously than ever; her poise, her manner indicated a quiet unchallenged self-satisfaction. She looked older than her years. There were lines about her tightly-closed mouth.

As a personage she had gathered further weight and importance. No list of patrons, no public committee of ladies, could be considered complete without her name and presence. The elders of her sex valued and esteemed her; the young timidly sought her favour and dreaded incurring her disapproval. She was prominent in all charitable work, giving her time, her energy, her money to every good cause. Dr. Forwood, who used to meet her in the homes of the humble sick as well as in the wards of the hospital, sometimes told her she was overdoing it and her health might suffer.

"I wish you could persuade yourself to take things a little easier," he said. "You are so sensible and hard-headed for other people. Why not have a little common sense on your own account?"

"Oh, I'm as strong as a horse," said Margaret, with a shy yet rather harsh laugh. "Nobody need bother about *me*."

Thus her legend had matured and solidified. She was typical, the slave of duty. She would develop into the combination of district visitor, sister of mercy, vigilance in-

spector, arbiter of morals, manners, and correctitude, that one meets grey-haired and honoured as first lady-mayor of her town or as the only woman representative on a Government commission appointed to inquire into the state of education or hygiene throughout the kingdom. "A confirmed old maid," said that bosom friend of her mother, old Mrs. Randall. Other good friends, Lady Rogers, Mrs. Purvis, and a few more, speaking of her with true affection, said it was a great pity. Far better would it have been for Margaret to marry and go away from Westmouth. Attachment to Westmouth had *narrowed* her. She ought to have seen more of the world. Then she would have enjoyed wider horizons and expanded to more natural aims. She was too fond of Westmouth. They all agreed on this.

Yet she hated the place really.

It was a prison, a prison that she could not leave although its doors stood wide open. Apparently unshackled, she was nevertheless bound hand and foot. Her spirit rebelling had urged her to fly, but she could not. She could not even make an attempt to secure an easily attainable freedom.

Oh, the futility of women's lives! Where are the great tasks, where the openings to fruitful endeavour? Sometimes she thought of what women used to do in the days before they emancipated themselves, with masculine training, rational dress, parliamentary votes, and all the rest of it. Perhaps they were really more enterprising and adventurous in those days than now. And they found despite all opposition such noble, such tremendous work to do. Florence Nightingale. Elizabeth Fry. . . . And the women travellers! A hundred years before the woman in Borneo, who was that woman, Lady Susan Somebody, first astride rider, for whom the deserts and mountains of the

East were familiar as Hyde Park or Wimbledon Common? Wives of missionaries too—fearing nothing, shirking nothing, taking part with the men they loved in a journey that was sometimes an ascent to Calvary spun out through twenty torrid years. . . . "No more was ever heard of the Reverend Mr. Dash and his wife. . . . There is too much reason to suppose that they both perished at the stake after being previously tortured. . . ." That was all the old books would say of the woman who died for the love of a man. What strength of character such women must have possessed!

But she too had latent power. No one understood her. Resting on a seat after hurriedly climbing to the cliff walks, she thought of these things, and her eyes as they looked out over the waters were themselves moist.

If one is shy one is thought to be proud. If one is reticent in showing emotion one is believed to have none. If one cannot, however much one tries, be expansive, genial, confident of obtaining a rapidly sympathetic response, one is shunned as a person of dull imagination and inadequate friendliness. The judgment of the world is always unjust, always cruel. But why do we judge at all, since we can never really know? . . . And she thought of the impenetrable barrier that shuts off and hides one human being from another. Yet the world speaks as if it was not there. Perhaps only in a million lives do two people get close to each other, tearing down pretences, sweeping away shame, reluctance, hesitation, and at last *knowing* each other.

She furtively wiped her eyes, ostentatiously blew her nose, and went downward into the town to complete the morning's shopping. She did this automatically and often with her mind far away. In the same manner she talked to friends who met her at the grocer's counter or by the pay-box at the chemist's, and none of them could in the wildest of conjectures have reached even the fringe of the thoughts she had been entertaining. Much less could even a close

and skilled observer, hearing her quick replies, her polite questions, and sharp little laugh, have guessed that she was an habitual day-dreamer. Nevertheless, often now she dreamed in daylight hours and while going about the ordinary business of life.

There was one most dreadful dream that in a time of weakness she had woven for herself, and then it had gone beyond her control; it had gained such strength as to overwhelm her. She feared it now and struggled against its onset. She opposed to it thoughts and memories of a pleasant nature, searching past experiences and desperately forcing her mind to a strenuous effort. Thus, as she walked homeward through the dull length of Downside Avenue, she had summoned memories of a September month years ago spent with her mother by the Lake of Como, and she was saying to herself, "I am on the road between Cadenabbia and Menaggio. . . . Yes, here are the cypresses and oleanders. That is Bellagio, all white and glittering, just like itself, as if I could really see it. I *can* see it, I *do* see it"—and there rose before her mental eyes the coloured awnings of row-boats, the paddle-box of a steamer, the light and sparkle of tiny waves on the sandy edge of the lake, green trees, red flowers, a bare hillside, the ochre-tinted belfry of a church tower. . . . By such respectable visions she exorcised the ugliness of her dream.

When not on duty with her mother for the whole afternoon she would slip out of the house and walk, even if it were already almost dark. The harbour had become a favourite point at which to aim. She went down there and back again in thirty or thirty-five minutes. If she had more time available she stayed down there, walking to and fro on the short stone pier, which often had not a living crea-

ture except herself upon it. At its far end was the iron turret and the harbour light. By the aid of this light and another halfway up the cliff the fishermen steered their boats to shelter and safety through the darkness and across the tumbling waters. Perilous work.

One bitterly cold afternoon in February she was there just when dusk had begun to fall. The wind stung her cheeks, every now and then a fleck of foam wet them; she drew her coat closely round her and pushed her gloved hands deep into its sleeves for warmth. She stood by the tower, as if waiting for the night to obliterate the harbour, herself, and everything else. But before the light altogether failed she saw the figures of two men come along the pier, go down some steps, and busy themselves with a boat.

They were Lane and his ruffianly companion. Slowly they got their boat ready, and then pushed off in it. Margaret watched them and felt paralysed by their recklessness and folly. They were putting up the sail. One of them swore and the other laughed. Suddenly, as the sail filled, the boat heeled over and both men leaned their bodies outward, while there came a rattle and splash of the water against the wood. Then, rolling and pitching, the boat passed beyond the end of the pier and danced upon the open sea. . . . Trying to get drowned—as the doctor had said. Madness. Wicked criminal madness.

That evening Mrs. Dacre had a slight headache and therefore retired early to rest.

"You had far better come too," she said to her daughter. "You look wretchedly tired."

"All right, I will," said Margaret, stretching herself. "Yes, I do feel a bit tired."

Demurely she joined Mead in the procession to Mrs.

Dacre's room, assured herself that everything was in order, bade a gentle and prim good-night, and then went to her own room, where she softly closed the door and as softly locked it. She always locked her door at night now, unlocking it again some time before the servant brought her tea in the morning. Listlessly and vaguely she moved about the room, as if she dreaded the labour of taking off her clothes. At last she began the necessary task.

Then, when she had half undressed, her face lost the little colour it possessed and she began to shake as if in an ague. Livid, gasping, she looked about her as one who vainly seeks aid in an anguish of distress. Then the tears came pouring down her cheeks, filling her mouth, drowning her, and she sobbed chokingly. Next minute she had turned out the light and flung herself face-downwards on the bed. She lay there, writhing, clutching, panting. . . .

They said that she was hard and lumpish. They said that she was deficient in sex feeling. They said she lacked imagination. What then was this? What was this storm, passing so terribly over and through her prostrate form, as it had passed more than once before to-night, in the darkness of the curtained room? The awaking of sex emotion? An amorous frenzy, the torment of unappeased desire, or only a despairing revolt against the loneliness and dull pain of a useless life?

The sobbing and gasping ceased. Silence joined the darkness of the room and made it seem still darker. But she was no longer there. The dream had taken her away. The dream, irresistible, overwhelming, held her, and she did not struggle with the dream. She was giving herself to its shame and horror. . . . She stood alone in a wood, and a dangerous man was coming—a satyr—a man-beast. Instead of hiding she stripped herself naked and stood in his path. But he passed by as if he did not see her. She ran after him as he plunged from the path to the tangled

depths of the wood. Careless of her torn flesh as she broke through the dense thicket, only guarding her eyes from the thorns and brambles, she pursued him and at last overtook him in a small open space where sunlight piercing the trees fell upon soft moss and bright flowers. She clutched his arm, dragged at it. Then she knelt, embracing his knees, striving to detain him, imploring him not to leave her. But now another voice was calling to him. He tore himself from her grasp, sprang away out of the sunlight into the dark shade of the undergrowth. And again she followed him. . . .

Somebody was knocking at the bedroom door. The handle turned. The locked door refused to open.

"Is that you, Mead? All right. Wait, please."

Scrambling off the bed she turned on the light and hurriedly wrapped herself in a dressing-gown. "Wait," she said again. Then after a minute she was sufficiently calm to open the door and allow Mead to see her face and hear her voice.

"It's for the aspirin," said Mead. "Mrs. Dacre finished hers yesterday, and I'm much to blame for not getting some more. But she says if you'd be so good as to lend her yours."

Margaret speedily found the bottle of tabloids.

"Tell her," she said, "that I'll come to her. . . . And ask if she would care for me to read to her. I could perhaps read her to sleep."

She went to her mother's room, and stayed there for more than an hour. By that time Mrs. Dacre was sound asleep. Back in her own room, Margaret herself vainly wooed sleep. The night dragged on and still she was wide awake.

Several times she got up, walked about the room, or

stood at the window holding the blind aside and looking out on the roadway and a gleam of light in the dark house opposite. The last time that she occupied this position she saw Lane return. For a moment he was under the light of the lamp-post; then she could just make out his figure as he moved through the garden. He disappeared in the porch, and doubtless let himself into the house with a latchkey.

All the while there had been a light on the upper floor. Perhaps that other, Ena, his woman, was sitting up for him!

HAVING looked at their neighbour through the eyes of so many different people, the Dacres were now to have him most unexpectedly presented from still another point of view.

Mrs. Dacre had made a foolish investment and then written to her lawyer in London for advice. Mr. Yardley, the lawyer, replying, said that other business called him to Westmouth, and he would be glad to dine and sleep at The Gables.

On the afternoon of the appointed day the guest's suitcase and an overcoat were delivered at the front door. These went upstairs and nothing more was thought about them. But then, much later, a startling piece of news was conveyed by Mead. The parlourmaid had just told her that when the visitor arrived with the luggage he had ordered the taxi-man to drive him on to Mr. Lane's. The taxi-driver had said that Mr. Lane's house was directly opposite to them at the moment. On this the visitor paid for the cab, dismissed it, and walked across the road. There he had remained ever since. There he was now.

"Well, upon my word," said Mrs. Dacre. "What next? This is a surprise with a vengeance."

It was the first thing she spoke of, even in the act of shaking hands, when Mr. Yardley presented himself with only comfortable time to dress for dinner.

"What! You really know Mr. Lane?"

"I should think I do," said Mr. Yardley. "I was his guardian till his twenty-fifth birthday."

"Well, does it not show how small the world is!" Mrs. Dacre could not get over her surprise. "It does seem such a wonderful coincidence."

"Where's the wonder?" asked Mr. Yardley, smiling good-humouredly.

"Well, this link—and nobody being in the least aware."

"Oh, but I was fully aware. . . . I should have told you, but he begged me not to. My inclination was to write and ask you to overlook their dubious status, and do what you could for them. But they did not want to know their neighbours."

"They did not want to know *us*. That's rather good. But let it pass. Please go on. I am enthralled—simply enthralled."

He went on, but not immediately.

He was one of those large white-haired elderly men who look more important and distinguished than they really are. Always beautifully dressed, with perfect manners and a benignly dignified outlook, he made an immediate impression in any company. People at once asked who he was, and obviously expected to hear in reply that he was a famous general, the governor of the Bank of England, or at least an ex-cabinet minister. To say, as his friends could, that he was an eminently respectable solicitor, liked and trusted by many clients of high rank and the most solidly grand position, seemed tame and flat as an answer, so plainly did it fall short of instinctive expectations. He had been a close friend of the late Mr. Dacre, and had known Margaret first as a queer, shy little girl with a long pigtail that often made her head ache and a brown holland pinafore that was generally ink-stained.

They had their dinner, and then after a glass of port he poured floods of fresh light on the engrossing subject. He talked well and liked talking.

Andrew Lane, the only child of elderly parents who died while the boy was at a preparatory school, had come under Mr. Yardley's charge in the natural course of business and friendship. So long as Mr. Yardley held control of Andrew's fortune all went fairly well. Then when Mr. Yardley

handed over the reins of government trouble began at once.

He described his ward at the age of twenty-five—a happy charming young man, a little spoilt perhaps, but with only one fault. His violent temper. And the bad temper of those days was more than balanced by his many good qualities. Generosity, openness, chivalry, courage, quick sympathy!

"Margaret, are you listening? Is not this a revelation? The other side of the shield. I really am amazed."

"Merely as a companion the boy had delightful characteristics. Contagious good spirits. We travelled together—a trip to India, another to the Rocky Mountains. We might both of us have been boys. He made me feel young just to be with him."

"Amazing," murmured Mrs. Dacre.

"And now, this afternoon——" Mr. Yardley paused, sighed, lit a cigarette. "This afternoon it was all in my mind and very painfully, as I thought of what he used to be and saw what he had become."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Dacre. "This bad habit."

"Ah, I feared it was no secret."

"He himself makes it public property."

"Unfortunately the drinking does not stand alone," said Mr. Yardley, emitting a puff of smoke and then shaking his white head sadly. "He has quite gone to pieces. Character, will power, all sense of proportion, everything seems to have slipped away. The effort of concentration demanded by ordinary life appears to be beyond him. Our discussion this afternoon was futile. Not a single point could be settled. Muddle. Confusion . . ." Mr. Yardley gave another sigh.

"*Please* go on," said Mrs. Dacre. "Bad temper is a dreadful thing. But do you attribute his downfall entirely to that?"

Mr. Yardley said no. The principal cause had been

reckless extravagance and extreme self-indulgence. Lane had passed from one unsavoury scrape to another. Gradually he had lost friends and alienated relations. The family was wealthy on both sides. One member of it, Sir Jerome Burnett, the well-known Yorkshire baronet, would probably have made Andrew his heir. But now Sir Jerome had cast him off for ever. Another relative was the old lady who had lived here—Miss Rolleston. She had left him, as well as the house across the way, some other house property. But it was all "dipped." Then, almost as if echoing the prognostics of the doctor, Mr. Yardley spoke of the hopelessness of Lane's future. The end of him would be the workhouse.

"I call that simply tragic," said Mrs. Dacre.

"It *is* tragic. Waste is always tragic," said Mr. Yardley. "And if ever good material was wasted and thrown away it is in that poor fellow. And only thirty-seven now. A young man still, by the modern standard."

"Tragic," repeated Mrs. Dacre. "Don't you agree, Margaret—now that we have been shown this other side of everything?"

Margaret did not answer.

"The war might have saved him," said Mr. Yardley reflectively.

"Oh, did he go to the war?" asked Mrs. Dacre.

"Certainly . . . Military Cross. Mentioned in despatches. Four years' service. But perhaps the strain had been too great. The reaction tested everybody. . . . Anyhow Andrew met the lady, and his fate was sealed."

"Ah," said Mrs. Dacre. "Now you come to the crux, don't you?"

Mr. Yardley told them then the story of Andrew's infatuation for Ena Talbot.

"But, Mr. Yardley," Mrs. Dacre asked, with the liveliest interest, "do let me know this. She was not Mrs. Talbot at all? I mean there never was a Mr. Talbot?"

"No," said Mr. Yardley smilingly, "I don't think she was a married lady. The prefix 'Mrs.' was a courtesy title."

"But if so, why didn't Mr. Lane marry her?"

"Because she wouldn't consent. By not marrying him she had him utterly at her mercy. She used to go away with other men, and then come back to him."

"Yes, I have heard that hinted at already."

"But the faults are not all hers, you know. . . . There's nothing more to say. They have quarrelled and parted, but they come together again. They make it up. And the same cat and dog life is resumed. It has lasted seven years. If he had fallen into different hands—another sort of woman might have kept him straight instead of dragging him down. But it is no use crying over spilt milk. . . . Now let us change the conversation."

They all went to the drawing-room.

"By the way," he said to Mrs. Dacre. "You must sell those shares for what they'll fetch. Mind, you will have dropped capital. That's very wrong. Let it be a lesson to you—and to you too, Margaret." Benign and playful, he held up a finger and shook it warningly at them, with an air as fatherly as though not only Margaret but Mrs. Dacre also had been young enough to be his daughter. "Hold fast to what you've got—for there's no more where that came from."

Tragedy. An always deepening tragedy. Margaret thought of it incessantly.

The walls of the house opposite no longer concealed even its innermost secrets. Looking across the road at any time of the night or day, she seemed able to see that doomed couple—the man who had been good and chivalrous in the beginning, a happy sympathetic companion, nobody's enemy but his own; and the woman for whom, with all her faults, doubtless many excuses could be made, in whose life perhaps there had been no single elevating influence, hardly a transient chance of escaping from evil and developing the better side of her nature. Margaret's heart ached for them.

The woman fell ill again. She was dangerously ill, as Dr. Forwood announced without reticence; but he only shook his head when asked questions about the other. He appeared to think that the subject of Mr. Lane had become too pitiful to allow of any further talk. The servants of The Gables, however, knew and reported that grief and fear were making Mr. Lane behave as if distraught.

In the anxiety and regret that one felt for those lost souls there was only one source of comfort. A distress that had long pursued them was over. They experienced no more difficulty with their servants, since Mrs. Cairns the charwoman had solved all problems by supplying a cook and another maid from the extended circle of her relatives. These excellent young women, one a widow and the other a contented spinster, were cousins with so strong an affection for each other that they would, as Mrs. Cairns said, put up with a great deal in order to keep together in the same situation. So far they had put up with everything.

The staff of The Gables respected them for their courage and tenacity. Mead often gave them praise in her chats with Mrs. Dacre. "That girl, Louisa Jones, is a really *nice* person," said Mead; "and what's more, a truly good cook and manager. She would be fit to come to you, ma'am, if we ever had to replace Amy."

"That indeed is a high character to give her," said Mrs Dacre.

Ena Talbot rallied; but with the first cold winds of autumn she had another illness, and by many signs all the world could guess its serious character. A specialist came from London to see her. A nurse wearing hospital uniform was established in the house. One saw Dr. Forwood's car stationed outside the gate three times a day.

Then there was a dreadful unforgettable evening when Mead repeated words that she had herself heard from the lips of the hospital nurse; and next morning the maid bringing her tea to Margaret told her that all was over across the road.

"Yes, miss, she passed away during the night. The blinds are down."

Presently Margaret stood at her window, shivering as she looked across at the darkened house. It seemed to stare back at her with sightless eyes. The sunlight was full upon it; the cruelly bright sunshine of a soft calm morning lit up all the road, striking gay notes of colour from the foliage of the trees, the glass at the top of lamp-posts, the granite kerb of the footpath, the wheels of a tradesman's cart. In the midst of all this unchanging life and light and colour, the house opposite had become cold and unsentient. Its very walls were dull; never again could the sunshine warm them. Life had gone out of their shelter. This tremendous thing had happened since yesterday, and

to-day it was no longer a house, a dwelling-place, a home. It had become a tomb. With this thought she had a swift impression that the house was rising higher, larger, infinitely more solid. It was made of imperishable stone instead of flimsy bricks and tiles; it dwarfed the other fragile little houses of the road; it filled material space as well as the wide horizon of ideas; it was a terrible ice-cold monument, passive and majestic, built to defy storms and floods, to last untouched by time, to remain through thousands of transient lives silently doing homage to that which is eternal—to death.

This chillingly oppressive fancy passed, and downstairs after breakfast she was thinking very sensibly as she watched for Dr. Forwood.

Instinct said that the doctor would certainly return to the house, and she wanted to speak to him as soon as possible.

He came, stopping his car at a little distance, and walking to the house. When he came out Margaret was at the gate of The Gables. She beckoned him to her.

"It is true then?" she said eagerly. "Tell me anything you can."

Dr. Forwood shook his head. It was too true, of course. He had nothing to tell.

"How is Mr. Lane taking it?"

"Like a madman. The girls are frightened out of their wits. I said they had better send for that old woman—the aunt."

"Ah, yes. That was wise of you. Mrs. Cairns. I had thought of her myself. She'll be useful."

While they stood talking Margaret's eyes were almost unceasingly turned to the house opposite. The front door was wide open. Yet the whole entrance was like the mouth of a dark cave into which the sunlight never penetrated at any hour of the day—a dark mysterious cavern leading to pain, danger, horror.

"You haven't shut the door over there," she said, without changing the direction of her eyes.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "A servant was about . . . Well, I must be off."

He left her and went to his car. It turned and rolled noiselessly away. Then a big motor-van swept with remorseless clatter between her and the house. After this had passed the road was completely empty and quite silent.

She stood without a movement gazing across at the dark entry. Twice the blood came racing upward and reddened her white face; a faltering, a sinking weakness followed; for a moment or two it was as if her heart had stopped beating, as if she also would die.

Then suddenly she walked across the road and entered the house.

It was exactly as she had seen it in imagination. How many thousand times had she done this before now? She opened the door of the dining-room, the room on the right of the hall, and looked in. Empty. Familiar as if she had lived with them all her life, the pieces of old-fashioned furniture met her gaze. The big ugly sideboard, the clumsy table with a green baize cover, the leather armchairs, the gilt clock and vases, the oil paintings and heavy gold frames—each object of the room fell into its place and completed the accurate mental picture that she had held for so long. Not a detail was incorrect.

Then she visited the back room, on the left, his study. Although less often described to her, this too was quite as she had imagined. Yes, the writing-table, the sporting-prints, the disarranged bookshelves, the untidiness, the litter, the visible signs of deep confusion and unchecked carelessness! She listened intently. The hushed voices of the servants were just perceptible in the silence. They were shut off by the door at the back of the hall and a length of passage leading to the domestic quarters. Then she heard

footsteps in the other room, the drawing-room, the room with the ormolu cabinets and red damask sofas of his inheritance, and the garish wall-papers that had been chosen by the dead woman . . . He was in there, pacing to and fro.

She opened that door, went in, and closed the door behind her.

"What is it?" he said.

She gave a queer choking gasp and remained silent, deadly pale.

Dressed in one of his shabby brown suits, but without collar or tie, and unshaven of course, he moved his slippered feet draggingly. His dark hair looked coarse and matted. His eyes seemed bloodshot and watery. His great shoulders were hunched. . . . He shambled to and fro.

Then it was as if he saw her again after forgetting that he was not alone.

"Well? Are you from the doctor?"

"No," she said jerkily. "I'm Miss Dacre—Margaret Dacre."

"Oh . . . What do you want?"

"Only to tell you how sorry I am. So dreadfully sorry for you."

He shrugged his shoulders. Then something like a muscular spasm made him jerk his head. He resumed his pacings.

The drawn blinds made a strange twilight all over the house, but this room seemed to be darker than the other two. Margaret had not moved from the door. She stood close to it, watching him with overpowering anxiety, and yet her mind continued to record unimportant matters; and her eyes, accustoming themselves to the semi-obscurity, began to see the natural colours that at first were lost in the greyness and the shadows. There was a small table with a brass beading and spindle legs that she felt sure had been purchased by a woman. It had a drawer, and in

the drawer were packs of cards, small patience cards. She could not have felt more certain of this if the table drawer had been pulled out and the cards actually shown to her.

After a time he asked her to go away.

"No, please let me stay with you a little while," she said pleadingly. "There are things to do. I can help you."

"No one can help me."

Abruptly he sat down and wept. But the silence of the room was unbroken. The tears streamed down his face and he uttered no word, made no sound. He cried as a child cries when, with a broken heart, it first recognises the atrocious cruelty of Fate and the irreparable nature of the disaster for which it is grieving.

She stood watching him, and did not attempt to speak to him.

All at once he began to talk volubly.

"I wouldn't believe—oh, God, I *couldn't* believe—although Forwood said so. She had come to herself, you know. She had told the nurse to get some rest. I was with her. She put out her hand, and it roused me. I had been asleep. Think of that. I had fallen asleep—on her last night—in her last hour . . . And she said, 'Andrew darling, you, you mustn't.' . . . That was all. Mustn't what? What d'you think she intended to say?" Without waiting for an answer he went on talking. "Did *she* know it was the end? Oh, I hope not . . . Oh, Ena, my poor, poor girl;" and he burst into noisy sobbing.

It was the transition from despair to protest. The use of his voice had broken down a restraint that was like a paralysis caused by pain. The sound of his unrepressed sobs seemed to fill the room, and yet all round the grey shadowy silence of the house was not disturbed.

Margaret came and put her hand on his shoulder, and held it there, making it as heavy as she could. She too was crying now. But she forced back the tears.

"Don't—don't give way," she said, with a semblance of strength and calmness. "But tell me everything. I want to know everything . . ."

He went on again. "Gone . . . In a moment . . . My own darling touching me like that, and then dead—lost to me, lost to me." He spoke now with queer gulpings and grimaces, as a person does when he has swallowed something that takes the breath away. "How much could she understand? Was she blaming me for letting her die?"

"She didn't know she was dying. But she knew you loved her. Your love gave her comfort, consolation."

"We loved each other. Good heavens, yes . . . What else was left to either of us? I'd given up everything and yet spoilt her life for her. I made her give up everything for me. But we had our love. I suppose you don't know what our kind of love is. People never do know till they've tried—what it means between a man and a woman who empty the world, so that they can stand alone, with nobody near them, and nobody daring to come between them."

"Yes, but indeed I do know—that is, I understand."

"Look here. She was brave. She knew what I was and faced it—never went back on me."

"Of course not. Why should she?"

"Why? Millions of reasons—and one that by itself was enough."

"You are speaking generously, as if it was all on her side. But you were good to her."

"I wasn't. That's a lie."

"No, truly, I don't think so. When one loses anybody one feels at once the terrible regret that one hasn't done sufficient for them, however much one has done . . . Besides, if she loved you, she would make allowances."

He raised his head and looked at Margaret. Then he repeated what he had said a minute ago.

"Ena was always very brave."

"You wouldn't have liked her if she hadn't been brave. You are brave yourself."

He stared hard at her. "What d'you mean by that? You don't know anything about me."

"Never mind. Only believe me, I understand quite well . . . Now one question. Have you had any food?"

He shook his head.

"I thought so. I'll get you some breakfast."

He shook his head again. "I can't touch anything . . . Yes. Get me some brandy."

"No," she said gently. "That wouldn't do you any good. Hot tea. You shall have some nice hot tea as soon as they can make it. Just wait quietly here."

She had resumed her rather priggish manner, and the calmness of her voice gave the old impression of unembarrassed confidence and self-satisfied contentment.

She went then through the hall to the part of the house belonging to the servants. She knew these back rooms almost as well as those at the front. In the scrupulously clean and tidy kitchen the two young women ceased whispering on her approach. Silent, wondering, they looked at her.

"Will you please get breakfast ready for Mr. Lane on a tray?"

In their surprise neither of them stirred.

"You are Louisa, aren't you? . . . Well then, please get breakfast ready . . . And you are Ellen?"

"Yes, miss."

"You know who I am?"

"Miss Dacre, from over the road, isn't it?"

"Yes."

The servants were amazed by her air of authority, but more than contented in accepting orders and feeling that somebody had providentially arrived to take command of the stricken household.

"As soon as you have done the breakfast, Louisa, you

can go on with your ordinary work. And you, too, Ellen. But first come with me . . . No, one moment. Where is the nurse?"

They said that the nurse had gone to bed, and asked if they should fetch her.

"No, don't disturb her. Let her rest. I assume she has done all that was necessary up there—I mean, in the room."

They said yes, there was nothing further to be done till the undertaker's men came. These might now be here at any minute.

"All right. And you have sent for Mrs. Cairns? You will be glad to have her with you . . . Another question—an important one;" and Margaret led the younger servant out of the kitchen.

"Where is the brandy and all that sort of thing kept? In the dining-room?"

"Yes, miss, in the sideboard, the cellarets."

"Now it is not advisable that Mr. Lane should have any stimulant at present."

"No, miss."

"I want all that put away. Yes, every bottle, whether wine or spirits. Have you a lock-up cupboard out there?"

Ellen said yes, there was a locked cupboard for stores, in charge of Louisa; and Miss Dacre superintended the hasty removal of the contents of the dining-room cellaret.

"If there is any more upstairs get it and put it away with the rest. Lock it up and give me the key. Not before Mr. Lane, you know, but privately."

Both servants, however, were alarmed. Their new commander was leading them to a perilous enterprise. They told her that she did not know what Mr. Lane was when angry.

"Yes, I dare say. It will be difficult, but I shall manage somehow. Now go on with it. I'll wait for the key."

She came from the kitchen with the key hidden in the sleeve of her blouse.

She sat with him at his miserable breakfast. After he had drunk the tea and eaten some toast, they talked again.

Then she endeavoured to persuade him to lie down and sleep. She begged him to consider the state of exhaustion that he had reached, whether he could himself feel it or not. He had passed through a terrible ordeal, he had suffered an immense shock. He really must avoid unremitting strain. Merely to stop thinking of his sorrow for a little while would help him to go on bearing it.

"I *want* you to. At any rate you must try. If I had any morphia I would give it to you. Anything to make you sleep. Perhaps I'll get something later from Dr. Forwood."

While talking in this style she had pulled a sofa towards the hearth and put a chair of suitable height at the end of it.

"You're so tall—such a big man. But this will be long enough. I'll fetch two of those great coats of yours to keep you warm."

When the improvised couch was all prepared he consented to stretch himself on it. She arranged the pillows under his head and covered him with the wraps. If he had been a small child and she his grown-up guardian, she could not more completely have taken possession of him and more infallibly enforced her will.

"A good nap . . . And I'll try to be here when you wake. . . ."

She went home then, to meet the storm of her mother's agitation, wrath, and distress.

"Where on earth have you been?" asked Mrs. Dacre, almost as if she really required information on this point. For a long time she had in fact been ignorant of Margaret's whereabouts, and had been exceedingly anxious on her account. Absence without leave was in itself so unusual as to be alarming. When time passed she was assailed by

thoughts of all kinds of accidents that might have happened. But just recently in some mysterious way news had reached Mead that Miss Dacre was in the house of death. Mead naturally did not keep the news from her mistress.

"You go out without your hat and coat," said Mrs. Dacre, working herself up to wrathful condemnation. "Not saying a word to anybody, you disappear. I demand an explanation. What have you been doing?"

Margaret told her that she had been with Mr. Lane.

"There is great misery over there," she continued calmly. "I am doing all I can to help. I shall go back there directly."

"That you will not. Have you lost your senses? You must never set foot in that house again;" and Mrs. Dacre said a great deal more.

Margaret scarcely pretended to listen. She had the air of one preoccupied with a labour of vast importance. At last a gentle smile relaxed her closed lips and she said, "Don't worry, mother. It's quite all right, and of course I must go back."

Half an hour later she recrossed the road, but wearing hat and coat now.

Mr. Lane was asleep. She crept into the drawing-room on tiptoe, went to the couch, and looked down at him. He lay on his side, offering the face in profile, and she saw, as she had seen once long ago, that this was finely-cut, handsome, even noble, and escaping the swollenness of cheek and neck, undeteriorated by evil ways, its outline still clear and sharp—like a face on a coin that has had rough usage and passed through many hands, but has yet remained with the stamp of a king upon it, recognisable, undeniable.

As she stood thus, motionless, gazing downward, she

was aware of the marvellous feelings that filled her breast and gave a new sense of power to each thought as it arose. Her pity for him strengthened her instead of weakening her. The fear of him seemed not to make her recoil but to draw her on. The knowledge of the difficulties and dangers that lay before her only increased her determination to overcome them.

For a couple of hours after this she was quietly busy. There were some letters to be written, including one to Mr. Yardley, the solicitor. She posted them herself at the town office, and while in the town she saw Dr. Forwood, went to the Registrar about the death certificate, and had a talk with Melford's manager.

Melford's, as well as providing Westmouth with furniture, conducted all the funerals of well-to-do residents.

Their men were at the house when she returned to it. The nurse had got up. Mr. Lane was still sleeping.

As soon as he woke more tea was brought to him, with some food, and Margaret shared the meal with him. She told him in almost a sprightly manner that she was quite hungry, for she had had no luncheon.

"That's wrong," he muttered. "Unreasonable not to ask. I suppose you know you could have had anything by asking . . . Oh, what cursed muck tea is"; and, in spite of her smiling protests, he continued to make disparaging criticisms of tea as a beverage. "Cat-lap. Old women's cordial, what? And there's another name for it. A vulgar name that perhaps you wouldn't want to hear."

"No, I certainly shouldn't," said Margaret demurely. "Try another cup."

"No, thank you." He said this with unexpected roughness. "Swill it yourself, since you're so fond of it. I'm through." But then immediately his tone altered. "I beg your pardon. Terribly kind of you—all this." And he said

he could not guess why she should do so much for him, but he was grateful. He expressed the sense of gratitude two or three times, his voice gradually subsiding until he merely muttered, "Yes"; and she saw that he was looking at her more and more searchingly. "No, I can't fix it. You're strange. There's something about you that I don't understand, but that *she* told me. I've forgotten"; and he put his hand to his forehead. "Everything has faded from my memory except the one thing . . . Ah." Sighing, he got up from the tea table and began to walk about again.

No more was said. Margaret sat watching him. Now and then she left him for a little while. When she came back he did not speak. He continued his desolate pacings. The afternoon was wearing on, the sunset hour drew near.

At last she said, very quietly, "I am going upstairs. Will you come with me?"

He stopped short and she saw his hand shaking. He had stretched out an arm as though to ward off an enemy.

"Yes," she said, "I think you had better." . . .

They went upstairs together into the room. The nurse in her clean white uniform was there, arranging some flowers, but she went out at once and left them alone. There were many flowers. The perfume of flowers had come to them as soon as they reached the landing. This room, which faced due west, had the long beams of the setting sun full upon its one window. A shaft of vivid light shot through at each side of the drawn blind.

"No, no, no," he said shudderingly. "Don't do it . . . I can't. You mustn't."

Margaret, with sad reverent gestures, was lifting the thin white sheet that covered the upper part of the recumbent figure. Slowly she drew it down, and disclosed the head, the shoulders, the folded hands. Lying high on the bed it was not like a dead body, but rather the effigy of someone who might still be alive, but living far away, beyond one's reach, altogether unapproachable. This had

been made by clever artists for remembrance. It was like and unlike—a narrow, sharp-nosed little face modelled in wax, colourless, without expression; yellow hair seeming smooth and close as fur, and two long bright wisps at the sides of the forehead.

"Oh, God. . . . No, I can't—I can't."

He had raised his hand to his eyes, hiding them, and he shuffled away backwards to the window. There he turned his back completely.

Margaret went on talking in a lowered voice, reverential but not awestruck, as one might speak when being shown round a sacred building—or when showing it to somebody else.

"She loved this room, I know. You moved her in here when she first was ill, so that she might have the afternoon sun. The sun used to shine upon the bed—before the night fell. Let us give her the afternoon sun—once more—for the last time."

Then she went to him at the window, and without his divining what she meant to do, she softly pulled up the blind.

"Now, look."

The yellow sunlight, brilliant, dazzling, like a broad river of liquid fire, poured into the room, flooded it. Full on the bed the yellow beams lit up the quiet resting form, and changed it to an effigy of pomp and splendour, a life-size figure made of pure gold lying high on a golden sarcophagus, such a dazzling trophy of grief and remembrance as fabulous kings might have caused to be fashioned in honour of a dead queen. The colourless face shone. The yellow hair flamed in drooping fire. The burnished nails of the clasped fingers glittered with a jewel-like brightness.

"Look," whispered Margaret. "Isn't it beautiful and wonderful?"

Then she knelt beside the bed and prayed.

"Come," she said rising from her knees. "Come now," and she took his hand and led him out of the room.

They were downstairs again, he and she. He no longer moved about. He sat upon one of the sofas with an arm thrown loosely across the back, his head sometimes right down on the arm, sometimes raised. Now and then she saw his shoulders move. He was shuddering. And gradually his whole posture seemed to become limper and more broken. It was as if muscles, nerves, and mind were together collapsing. She felt afraid.

All at once he got up and crossed the hall to the dining-room, she following him. He went towards the sideboard, but from the threshold of the room she spoke to him.

"You won't find anything there."

He had turned. He stood still, looking at her, and during this pause he seemed as if rousing himself, slowly dragging himself from a condition of semi-trance. She saw him square his huge shoulders and throw back his head. Instinct told her that he was awaking to a fit of rage, that he would be loud and terrifying in anything he next said to her. Yet when it came it was so fierce, so brutal, that no anticipation had really prepared her for it.

"What the devil d'you mean?"

She said, after another pause, "I have had everything put away. You mustn't drink. I want you to stop drinking."

He was violent then both in words and bearing. One of those outbursts of which she had heard so much and so often was upon her. He shouted at her, he began to rave.

"Hush!" she said. "Come back to the other room. I want to talk to you. There are things I have to say, and you mustn't be angry with me."

He became quiet, only muttering as he stared at her. When she moved from the doorway he went after her. As

soon as they were in the drawing-room she said reproachfully, "You can't, you know. Promise me that you won't drink until the funeral. Think. It's so awful. *She* would know."

"She wouldn't mind. She knows I drink. She drank herself."

"Yes, but that's over. That's utterly gone. She wouldn't want you to drink now. It would pain her. It would grieve her."

He shouted again. "Look here. Stop this. I don't know who you are, or why the devil you have pushed yourself in at such a time. . . . No—I oughtn't to have said that. I'm grateful. You've been very good. But don't be a blasted fool. You can see, can't you? Some other time I'll thank you. Please leave me alone now."

"I can't," she said. "Try and listen to me quietly. I've asked you to promise that you won't drink till after the funeral. That's not very much, is it? You know you ought to give the promise. It isn't true what you said about her. *Think*." And Margaret talked a little wildly, perhaps not altogether knowing what she said, seizing on any words that came, in her intense effort to influence him, to impress him. She spoke about the aspect of the dead face, the tremendous change it had undergone, the peacefulness of it, and the glory when the sunlight bathed it. Such a wonderful light. Symbolically the light of another world, the radiance of the soul when released from the casket of dull clay, the wonderful, most wonderful illumination of spiritual life when matter falls away into its natural deadness. . . . "Go upstairs and look at her again."

He shuddered. Dropping on a chair by the small card-table he leaned his forehead on a hand. But presently he sat up and once more gave her a searching scrutiny with those heavy bloodshot eyes.

"It's all coming back to me—I remember." As he said this he laughed, not in mirth, but bitterly, cruelly. "You

are the stuck-up, sanctified, touch-me-not young lady from over the road. Don't dare to speak of her again. She told me all about you. She used to watch you from that window. She hated you."

"She had no reason to hate me," said Margaret meekly. "*I* might have hated her, but I never did."

He burst out at this with violence, saying that everybody had loved her, gentle and simple, young and old. "People of your class—stuck-up, psalm-singing, hypocritical women of your sort—aren't fit to wipe her shoes. D'you hear? I tell you everybody who ever saw her was fond of her."

Margaret spoke enigmatically. "Everybody might have done so, naturally, and deserve no credit for it, except myself."

He asked her what the hell she meant by that, and she said: "I'll tell you some time, but not now."

She talked to him, softly, kindly, very gravely, and he allowed her to talk. He listened as if too weary to protest. He seemed worn out. Then something in her gentleness and persistence so affected him that again he suddenly broke down. For the second time her heart was wrung by the sight of his tears. He repeated that she had been very good to him. He said he did not know whether she was right or wrong, but he would promise, adding at once that he would probably break the promise.

"Oh, no, you won't," said Margaret confidently.

"Yes, don't trust me—don't let anyone trust me." And he bemoaned the unhappiness dealt out to him, upbraiding Fate and his own criminal weakness. As a man sows he reaps. The luck goes. The wheel turns the wrong way. But now the game was over. Destiny had got him down and out. He was utterly done for, and utterly alone.

Margaret said: "You are not done for, you are not alone"; and with strong feeling she appealed to him to pull himself together and rise from the morass. He could

do it if he tried. It is never too late to mend. Other men, in far worse plight than his, had redeemed themselves. While you live you can hope. Nothing in life is too good to come true. . . . Emotion gave her eloquence. The words did not matter. With gestures, with pleading eyes, with each new intonation of her voice, she attacked his sensibility and strove to arouse an emotional response. She succeeded. He was moved, he was shaken.

She said, too, that she would stay with him. She would be with him as much as possible until the funeral. She would keep away any other intruders, and go about with him.

"I want to take you out now. I have waited till it was dusk. You must have air"; and she told him to finish dressing. But he need not shave, or even put on a collar. "Get your muffler—and an overcoat, of course."

They went out together. Although it was late, people were still in the streets. Many people saw them.

"Take my arm," she said, when they had gone a little way; and he did so. He walked badly. Very soon he was tired, leaning on her, and dragging his feet. They sat on a seat in the public gardens while he rested. She kept him out for an hour and a half.

THEY had been seen walking together. That was enough. Later the scandal of Mr. Lane and Miss Dacre was immeasurably to surpass in interest the scandal of Mr. Lane and Mrs. Talbot. But at the first whisper of it, Westmouth was merely dazed. It was too big to handle without practice. It took one's breath away. Friends of the family meeting in the street only said, "Have you heard? . . ." "You mean about Margaret Dacre. Yes, I heard it yesterday."

Certain intimates, however, were already speaking freely. Mrs. Dacre had summoned those two staunch allies, Mrs. Randall and Lady Rogers. Each of these ladies in turn tackled Margaret, remonstrated with her, reasoned with her. "You have let your good feeling run away with you," said Lady Rogers; "but Mrs. Dacre is absolutely right in urging you to stop at once. I implore you to obey her." . . . "You are breaking your mother's heart," said old Mrs. Randall. "Really it is wicked of you. You of all people in the world to do such a thing—you who talked of pitch and defilement." Nor was Dr. Forwood wanting in plain talk. Taking the privilege of age and friendship, he earnestly begged Margaret to cease personal communication with the house opposite.

Such protests were without avail.

Mrs. Dacre herself had renounced her storming habit, and she wailed entreaties. From the very first encounter, on the morning of Mrs. Talbot's death, she had realised that she was up against something entirely new. It was not like the old obstinacy. In the past Margaret had sometimes been very obstinate, but the temporary opposition then had been heavy and dull, "*mulish*," as Mrs. Dacre used to

say; now it was smooth and radiant with a quiet granite flash and the inflexibility of polished steel. It was not contumacious resistance, but a calm determination. Margaret smiled at the idea of modifying it. Face to face with the magnitude of these changes, Mrs. Dacre felt terrified by thoughts of whither they might lead, and what would be their ultimate result. Aghast, impotent, she trembled. She had a daughter that she could no longer control. She was a slave-driver who has had the whip snatched from her hand and cracked over her head in a fury of rebellion.

And during these two or three days the external change in the girl was quite as remarkable. She looked much younger. Her hard manner had gone. Her mouth had lost its pinched and narrowed aspect; the downward line at the corners of the lips had vanished. Her whole face had a freshness and softness that it had never worn. Sometimes it glowed with healthy colour. As if happiness had lit the flameless lamp of her body, she seemed full of burning energy. She moved more quickly, her gestures had greater freedom. Indeed all these things were but the reflection or complement of the inward state. She possessed what she had never had before, a purpose in life, the certainty of an allotted task.

She was with him for the greater part of the day, and saw him again during the evening. All business matters as well as affairs of household management were attended to by her. She had been through his wardrobe and found a sufficient supply of black garments. An assistant from Berger's came to cut his hair and to shave him. They went out openly by daylight because she wished to give him as much fresh air as possible. He submitted himself apathetically to her charge, in an automatic style he obeyed her orders.

The return to the house invariably brought a difficult

hour. So far he had kept his promise. But he would often complain of this restraint, now querulously, now angrily. He said it was doing him harm. He could not digest his food.

"But you will soon," she said cheerfully. "You'll begin to eat with real appetite. Then you'll get strong and well again before we know where we are. . . . Meanwhile have another of these"; and she offered him one of the sweet, drugged tabloids that she had procured on the advice of Dr. Forwood.

He was childish then. He threw the box of tabloids across the room. Without a word she went and fetched it, replacing its strewn contents.

Sometimes she felt that he not only behaved as a child, but that he looked like a child. At such moments there was a wistfulness in the expression of his tired and time-worn face that affected her profoundly. Occasionally, once at least, while still in this mood, he said something that stirred her to her very depths.

"Now we are friends, you won't turn against me?"

"Oh, no," she said, "I won't turn against you—not ever."

Yet immediately after this he was rude and coarse. He laughed scornfully. He stormed at her as at a person who bored him and annoyed him. He seemed trying to show that he disliked her companionship.

In conversation he repeated the same thing again and again. As if he had lost count of time, he spoke often of the interminable delay before the last rites were paid to the silent occupant of that upstairs room.

"I have told you," Margaret said, "it will be only three and a half days altogether. That is quick. It would not be nice to hurry."

When he was persistently silent she became alarmed. As Dr. Forwood had said long ago, protracted silences were a bad sign. He should be forced to talk.

She herself talked, even when he manifested a contemptuous irritation.

"You don't remember it, but once, in the dark ages, I made you speak to me"; and she told him of their meeting on the harbour quay, when she asked a foolish question in order to get him to say something. "I was resolved to make you do it."

"Why?"

"I wanted to hear your voice. . . . It's a nice voice, Andrew—like no one else's. You haven't spoilt it by all the bellowing and roaring. . . . Lots of men have hateful voices. A man I used to know, Mr. Warren, had a feeble slimy voice that made me feel as if I had touched something nasty and dirtied myself. He wanted me to marry him."

"Why didn't you?"

"How can you ask—after what I've just said? He married a skinny widow called Hopkinson. I think she can only have done it for his money, and they say he doesn't let her have much of it. He's quite well off, but mean—or so they say. I don't know, myself, and I don't care."

"And I'm sure I don't," said Lane irritably.

One could not interest him or divert him. He was very restless too. She had many proofs of the truth of Mr. Yardley's words concerning his mental state. It had become almost impossible for him to concentrate his attention. His mind resembled derelict land over which the thoughts strayed, rather than making their way in any definite direction. The least obstacle turned them aside. Any solid barrier defeated them altogether.

And there were long dull lapses without any real thought, however vagrant, the mind quite empty except for the sense of bereavement, the numb feeling of a great sorrow. At such times, as Margaret saw, he was more like a wild animal mourning for its mate than a human being intelligently grieving.

At night she was worn out, dead tired. As she stretched

herself in the bed that had once been a place of torment she remembered every incident, every phrase, every doubt, fear, hope of the day. The whole of the long day was still hers. It had passed, but it would not die. In this new life the world was permanent as well as beautiful, because so full of meaning, so rich in accomplishment. Marvellous. Beneath thought and sensation there flowed in her a river of joy. She was sad for him, anxious for him, but for herself joyous.

The night changed to morning in dreamless sleep.

A strongish wind that had blown of late dropped entirely, and the sun shone from a vast cloudless sky throughout the day before the funeral. It was indeed one of those perfect days of which autumn always gives two or three, to startle and delight when we have thought of warmth and brightness as irrevocably forfeited things, days that we revel in and then forget, so that next year when the same bounty is vouchsafed we are again filled with wonder. In the early afternoon she persuaded him to go as far as one of the lower walks on the cliff above the old town, and they remained there till the sun was low.

Strolling, sitting to rest, then strolling on again, they made the time glide away peacefully and easily. That at least was the experience of Margaret. She felt an unreasoning elation in the pleasant sunlight and delicious air. All that she looked at seemed lovely, with a loveliness that it must often have possessed—although imperceptible to her—the old town and its queer piled-up houses, all white and black in the sharp light and correspondingly heavy shadow; the little port, toylike, dainty, sparkling, here a

stone tower, there a brown sail; the fringe of white foam on a strip of yellow beach; no mist, no vagueness, only a transparent golden dust to the furthest limits of the smooth, unruffled expanse of ocean, each solid object clear-cut, gaily-tinted, vividly near; the blue sky unstained even by the smoke of any passing steamers.

Once he had leaned his hand on her shoulder, and she told him to do it again, but he would not. Now, as they paused to look downwards before turning back along the path, she took his arm and joined her hands upon it. She spoke to him with admiration of the scene.

Then of a sudden he tore himself free and shook her off quite roughly.

"Andrew!" she said plaintively. "Why did you do that? Are you angry with me?"

"No. Yes." And he had become fierce, strong, redoubtable. "I'm angry with myself. You are trying to make me forget. I don't want to forget."

"That's not true, Andrew," she said. "I have asked you to remember her."

Then, with a queer mingling of an abandonment to fierceness and an effort not to be brutal, he said that he had had enough of it. It was all well-meant, but he couldn't stand any more of it. "Besides, I feel there is something treacherous in it. Yes, it *is* an abominable treachery to her. I've told you that she hated you."

"Oh, that's an exaggeration. She didn't like me, but then, she didn't know me. It was simply that I had got on her nerves. She talked about me because there was so little else to talk about. But I was of no real importance to her. None whatever."

He hesitated, and she heard him muttering under his breath. His moods changed from moment to moment. His emotional instability was beyond belief. But, as she thought with tender compassion, everything was, of course, due to his state of health.

"Well," he said aloud, "you've got on *my* nerves, too. You're smashing down my nerves. She understood. You don't. It isn't safe, this knocking me off my drink. Consult Forwood. He'd say just the same. But you've played on my feelings, and made me do it. . . . Miss Dacre, I don't want you to think me unkind, or ungrateful. I'm not. But I simply can't go on with it. You've pushed yourself in——"

"But, Andrew, it *is* unkind of you to say that."

"Why the devil d'you call me Andrew? I never asked you to. I don't call you Margaret."

"But I want you to. It's silly not to."

He stood staring at her; and again everything seemed to break—purpose, resolution, knowledge of what they had been talking about. "Oh, God, how tired I am. Can't you let me sit down?"

She led him to one of the benches, and they sat there in silence. It was he who ended the silence.

"I want to go away. I can't go back to that house after to-morrow. I can't live there."

"No," she said, "that's out of the question. I want you to go as soon as possible. That will be in a very few days—or a week at the very outside. But leave it to me. I'll arrange everything."

"No, I won't leave it to you," he shouted. "Damn you. Can't you see that I'm sick of you and your arrangements? I've told you so. What are you after? What are you thinking about? I never heard anything like it." He was incoherent in his anger. He had sprung up from the seat and moved a step away, but she too had risen, and she stood close to him. "Lunacy—persecution. Senseless. What d'you fancy you'll get out of it?"

She spoke very gently. "What am I to get out of it? Why am I doing it? You *know* why I'm doing it, Andrew. You know really."

Then in quite brutal terms he rejected her. He said she

was going down a wrong road. She might have guessed that she had turned into a no-thoroughfare. The anger presently fading, he spoke with a sombre intentness and more consecutively, if not logically, than on any previous occasion; but lassitude soon overwhelmed him, so that they had to sit down before he had finished. When seated, he unexpectedly grasped her hand, held it, shook it firmly and dropped it as if to imply that this was a parting gesture, to indicate a friendly farewell. "Leaving me out, old thing, a dashed sight better for you." And he warned her that he was hateful with women. Any woman that had to do with him was the most unlucky wretch in the world. "There's something about me that women don't like."

Margaret, flushing, said that this could not be so.

"Not at first," he said, "but later. Pretty soon. It has always happened. It did with Ena. Yes, even with her. And always, before then, with every girl I made love to—after I had got her, I mean. They couldn't hide it. They couldn't avoid letting me see. . . . I'm talking of when I was young—before I went to the bad"; and he laughed bitterly. "You wouldn't think it, but I was fairly attractive then. Not the hero of a penny novelette—but charm of manner, lofty air, amiable personality."

Again she spoke in that gentle soothing tone. "Suppose that's how I see you, Andrew? As you used to be. Not as you are now. Suppose that's how I've seen you from the very first?"

He shrugged his shoulders and frowned at her. Then he told her that it was the failure on his side and the revulsion shown by women that had made him such a brute to them. "I pay them out. I can't help doing it. They'd better go straight to hell than have anything to do with me."

"You're trying to frighten me," said Margaret, smiling. "But you're not frightening me a bit."

"I'm warning you," he said. "If you're such a fool that you can't take a warning, be it on your own head. But if

you've a scrap of sense or decency left, keep out of my way."

"Very well," she said quietly, and as she looked at him her eyes were soft and lustrous.

They walked homeward. When they came into the streets, he stopped short and thrust her from him again. Staring at her he jerked his head in the direction of Downside Avenue.

"There's your road, Margaret. Take it. I'll go round by the Square. I can find my way alone."

"No," she said, "I'm coming with you"; and for a second time she put her hand in his arm.

When they reached the house, she said: "Now it shall be good-night, if you wish. But I could come in and sit with you for a little while, if you like."

"I don't care," he said gloomily, and he went into the house in front of her.

She followed him.

THE funeral service had been performed. Now the evening had come. He was in a very bad way. She had experienced great difficulty in making him return to the house at all. At the cemetery gates he tried to give her the slip; but she divined his intention and brought him back.

She had never left him since then. They had had some sort of dinner together, and in a heavy discomfort for one, and a growing anguish of apprehension for the other, time crept slowly on. His vow had ended, and he wanted to drink again. Early that day she suspected that he had somehow procured alcohol, but she was not sure. Later she believed her suspicion to have been unfounded.

Now, in these evening hours, he made no secret of his desire.

She tried to brace herself for the task, she mutely whispered her determination not to fail. She was sitting on a sofa, and he sat at a distance on a straight-backed chair which she had asked him to change for one more comfortable. But he would not move. He sat, not upright, but huddled, leaning a little forward, his hands hanging down between his knees; and it was as if mind and body sank together, for in this attitude he had one of those long silent lapses. When she spoke to him, he refused to answer. He did not even raise his eyes to look at her.

Then in a moment the thing became dreadful.

He was looking at her steadily. He got up and moved towards her. His voice, when he addressed her, was subdued, sounding forced, unnatural, and the actual words he used did not seem to harmonise with his threatening aspect. They were mockingly courteous, pompously deferential.

"Will you kindly give me the key of that lock-up place you mentioned—I mean the place to which you were so very good as to consign some of my property—yes, consumable stores, as yachtsmen would say."

"No, I can't, Andrew."

"May I ask, why not?"

"Well," and she gasped as though getting breathless. "For one reason—because I couldn't, even if I wished to. . . . Oh, don't look at me like that. . . . Andrew, it isn't here. It's at home."

"Then fetch it."

"No."

"Go and fetch it!"

"No! Andrew, if you force me to, I'll never forgive you. If you try to get at the drink to-night, I'll never speak to you again."

"Oh, indeed! Thank you for nothing." . . . But now his tone changed. "You're lying," he said furiously. "You're telling me lies. You have the key. I believe it's there in your handbag."

The handbag lay on the sofa beside her. Instinctively she clutched it and rose to her feet.

Then it was a real fight between them. He had seized her and they struggled together, he to gain possession of the bag, and she to retain it. She was helpless against his strength, although as yet he did not exert it, but she fought wildly, desperately. Soon the bag was burst open. The key, her purse, and much else dropped to the floor. At the same moment he handled her with pitiless roughness, and sent her staggering so that she nearly fell.

She sat upon the sofa, crying, twisting her body, bewailing herself. "Oh, oh, oh. . . . You're making it very hard for me. . . . How could you—oh, how *could* you?" Without looking round she was aware that he had gone back to his chair, and she believed that he watched her sullenly and gloomily. At any rate he remained quiet,

doing nothing, and she continued her lamentations. "It isn't fair. It's mean to behave like that." And as if reciting a story, she ran over the many serviceable deeds she had performed. She had arranged for almost everything. Local tradesmen had sent in their bills to date. The house and furniture were to be sold. Mr. Yardley was going to help. She had given Mr. Yardley full instructions. "And then, when all is going well, you want to upset it. I do really call it too bad of you. . . ." Finally she looked round at him. "Andrew, aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Yes," he said quietly. Then, after a pause: "Margaret, you can pick up that key. I shan't use it."

"Oh, how *lovely!*" At once she was on her feet again, and after putting the key and the other things into the broken handbag she knelt beside his chair. "There's your better nature asserting itself," she said joyously. "There's the *true* Andrew. He is always there—if only you'll let him appear, and don't wickedly hide him."

"Poor old girl." He put his hand under her chin and lifted it, so that her head was tilted back, and he could see her whole face. "I'm sorry. Did I hurt you? I didn't mean to."

"No, you didn't hurt me—not to speak of"; and she smiled up at him. "I shall have some nice bruises on my arms, and perhaps on my back too. But I'm not going to evening parties, so it doesn't matter. Would you like to see me at a party all in black and blue?"

"Look here," he said, with the same quiet tone of voice. "I'll renew my promise—for another week."

"*Andrew!*"

"Yes, I promise."

"How glorious. Now let me get you your pipe. Go on smoking. Keep smoking, and that will help you against the sharpness of the craving."

"Oh, you do know something, then? You admit it really is a job to withstand it?"

"Of *course* I do. I know it must be terrible. And I think you are being perfectly splendid in overcoming it."

She got up from her knees, glanced at the ugly gilded clock on the chimney-shelf, and spoke gaily.

"Half-past ten. I didn't know it was so late."

Soon after this she asked him to go to bed; but he would not, although confessing that he was "dog-tired." About going to bed he said that he could not face the ordeal. To lie there all alone and think of the empty room would be too awful.

She said "Listen. If you like, I'll stay here all night. Yes, if you go to bed and try to sleep, I'll sit with you in your room. I'll stay there all night, so that you can know you won't be alone."

"No," he said. "I can't let you do that. But it's good of you. Yes, I'd like it, but I can't let you do it."

"I will."

"No," he said again quite gently. "No, my dear, it's sweet of you to offer it. But it wouldn't be right for me to accept. I can't—I mustn't."

She said: "I want to. I'll go away early in the morning, and I'll come back and we'll talk."

And immediately she made her little arrangements, visiting the domestic quarters and communing with both the servants.

"I do not consider it safe to leave Mr. Lane alone. I must sit up with him."

"Yes, miss."

But Miss Dacre would be obliged if Louisa the cook would spend the night on the camp bedstead in Mr. Lane's dressing-room, with the door between the two rooms open. Thus Louisa could come to Miss Dacre at any minute if called for. This kind of useful chaperonage by Louisa would, as Miss Dacre indicated with a touch of her relinquished primness, satisfy the requirements of propriety.

"You will understand, Louisa, that I do not wish to give occasion for talk."

"No, miss, there's been too much talk about this house already."

Then Ellen, the other young woman, was put in action.

"Ellen! First of all. Please go over to The Gables, get hold of Mead, and tell her I am staying here late. . . . Say I am quite all right, and I don't need anything sent to me. I have my latchkey."

When she crossed the road next morning, the milkman with his cart and the postman with his bag both saw her; and Mead, solicitously spying out for the truant, saw that they had seen her.

Before very long Margaret went to her mother's room. She was white of face after her vigil, but composed in demeanour. These early visits had long been customary, and she greeted Mrs. Dacre with the affection that she had always shown in the old days. Mrs. Dacre, however, repulsed such normal advances.

"This is the climax, Margaret. After this nothing can surprise people, although it may disgust them."

The interview was brief. Considering the importance of the subject discussed, extraordinarily little was said by either.

"No doubt," said Mrs. Dacre, "I might have expected a sinister culmination; for, from the hour of that poor woman's death—or at least from the hour you heard of it—you have behaved as if you were in love with him. Throwing discretion to the winds, you——"

Margaret interrupted her. "As to my being in love with him, as you say—I've always loved him."

"Then more's the pity. But that is not enough. You

must needs compromise yourself, disgrace yourself. . . . Take it from me, Margaret. You will find you have rendered it impossible for you to live in Westmouth."

"I don't want to live here. I don't mean to. . . . That's something I'd like to speak of any time you can let me"; and Margaret said that she was distressed by the necessity of terminating the household partnership. Without doubt in the future she would require the full employment of her income, but, nevertheless, she hated the notion of causing her mother great inconvenience.

"Oh, it's too late in the day to think of me," said Mrs. Dacre. "Besides, I have said a hundred times, your money is your own and you can spend it how you please."

"Mother, be kind to me. I need your kindness. . . . Really I have done nothing to forfeit it."

"That's a matter of opinion," said Mrs. Dacre coldly.

One evening Margaret was with him in his bedroom. The wardrobe doors gaped widely; the drawers in chests and tables were half-out; the floor was almost entirely occupied by trunks, wooden boxes, piled garments, papers. She was packing up, and this labour entailed a great deal of unpacking first. She had been at it during most of the day.

He lolled upon the bed, smoking, and idly watching her as she worked for him so busily.

The strong light of the lamp above the bed showed him as very different from the man he had been such a little while ago. He was thinner. Indeed his loss of flesh within

the space of eight or nine days had progressed with astounding rapidity. The puffiness of cheeks and jowl was so much reduced as to be scarcely perceptible. He was neatly-dressed, close-shaven, with his dark hair smooth, glossy, well-brushed. But he did not as yet look healthy. His face was far too pale, and in repose it seemed to bear the imprint of long endured pain. Anybody knowing nothing about him would assuredly have guessed that he was a man who had passed through strange and perhaps terrible experiences. He looked like a sailor after a shipwreck, or a war prisoner lately released—or a traveller just escaped from famine and torture in Bolshevik Russia, and although now safe, not yet able to shake off that cruel nightmare-dream and begin to enjoy his immunity.

"What is it?" he asked.

Margaret had gone to the window, and standing there, looking at the dark roadway and the lights in the house opposite, she laughed softly.

"Where's the joke?"

"It's so funny," she said, "to be looking over from this side of the road. The house of my blameless spinsterhood is now the picture. How odd. It seems all queer—not a bit familiar. . . . What's the time? Nine! Mother is in the drawing-room—and somebody with her. A taxi drove up just now. I wonder who it can be. . . . Andrew, I mustn't be late to-night."

She returned to one of the trunks and continued working.

"Oh, these old clothes! Did you *never* throw anything away? I think we shall have to make a bonfire."

Then once more she went to the window. It seemed unnatural, mysterious, impenetrable, that place over there. The lights told her much. But she could not look into the known house as she used to look into this unknown house here. She could not, in imagination, see the people behind the dark walls; she could not hear them talking.

Had she been able to do so, she would have seen her mother seated before the fire with Mrs. Randall, and listening to their conversation, would have been greatly interested, and not a little relieved.

Mrs. Dacre had called for the staunch friend by telephone—not, of course, using the instrument herself, but getting Mead to operate it for her.

"Beg Mrs. Randall to come to me. It is most urgent."

And Mrs. Randall had come in the taxi-cab. She sat holding her old hands to the comfortable warmth of the fire, nodding and smiling, in a state of drowsy contentment till Mrs. Dacre roused her to startled attention.

"I believe," said Mrs. Dacre, "that Margaret intends to go away with that man."

"No—oh, no!"

"What's the use of saying no when I say yes? No amount of noes will prevent it happening."

Mrs. Randall explained that the implication of her negatives was not a flat contradiction, but rather a query—such as "You don't say so? Is it possible? Who would have thought it?"

"I cannot any longer doubt," said Mrs. Dacre. "Incidentally—not that it matters—it is hard luck on me"; and she looked fondly round the room. "I am given my marching papers too."

"How do you mean?"

Mrs. Dacre said she could not afford to carry on The Gables unaided, and she went over all the ground of finance. "*Quite* out of the question. . . . That is, unless I could find someone to join forces with me and pool resources." Step by step then, moving carefully, she advanced to the suggestion that this new partner might be Mrs. Randall.

"We get on well together," she said more briskly. "Two lonely old birds!" And she was bright and facetious. "We only want one perch—but each can have its particular favourite seed. . . . Eh?"

Mrs. Randall entertained the proposal favourably. She said, however, that time was needed for consideration. She saw all the advantages, but there might be drawbacks. . . .

Mrs. Dacre was well satisfied. Her old friend would eventually do it. The problem had been solved.

"You would take over Margaret's room. It is the best in the house. At least many people think so. Mine is larger, but it has no view."

An hour or so had passed.

Margaret was on her knees now, unpacking a wooden box that contained a horrible medley—books, old socks, tattered garments, shoes with big nails, small pieces of field-service equipment. "Oh, my goodness! What next?" The bedroom was tidier now. Most of the trunks and portmanteaux had been pulled to the walls. He still occupied the bed, lolling in the same attitude. As she worked through this last collection of rubbish she talked to him, pursuing the thread of a talk that they had not quite finished.

"No, I never intended to keep you waiting till we're married I mean, of course we'll live together in London. Everything will be easy in London. In London we shan't have a lot of stupid people watching our movements and sitting in judgment on our motives . . . There! That's done." She was pitching the things back into the box. "All of it for the bonfire."

She got up, stretched herself, wiped her dusty fingers on a cloth. Then she went to the bed.

"Good-night, Andrew." While saying the words she had taken his face between her hands, and she kissed him.

Slowly he put his arms round her and held her fast. Her warm cheek lay against his mouth, her hair swept his eyes. For a moment or two she was unresisting, passive, as if without life, except for the slight quivering of her body as he pressed it closer to him. Then she kissed him again and tried to release herself. "Let me go, darling," she whispered, gently pushing him from her. "Be good. Think. Such a little time to wait . . ." She was free now, and she spoke to him as she moved to the door. "Don't come down with me. Good-night—good-night, my own one."

SOFT and limpid as water, bright as cut crystal, the noontide sunshine of an April day was falling upon all the loveliness of Taormina while a little group of visitors climbed the last height that leads to the Greek theatre.

They dispersed themselves among the ruins, vacant now after the departure of a drove of Cook's tourists in charge of peremptory guides. With exclamations of appropriate delight they regarded the splendours of a vanished civilisation. They were bound together in no closer bond than that of hotel acquaintanceship, and making a party for the day had come here from Messina. Ten or twelve of them all told, they comprised a middle-aged clergyman and his middle-aged sister, an elderly lady with a sketch book which she was determined to use, another elderly lady with a camera which she dreaded might incur confiscation if she snapped too openly, a limp, skinny man carrying a white sunshade, a stout red-faced mother with an exuberant daughter and her kindly busybodying father, and lastly a comparatively young or youngish couple.

There was a certain air of distinction about these two that was lacking in their companions, who all bore the stamp of uninteresting mediocrity and could serve, no matter where one found them, as typical representatives of middle-class England. For one thing the woman was so much better dressed than the ordinary female tourist. Looking slim and tall in her dark tailor-made jacket and skirt, she wore a simple little hat that could only have come from Paris, and from a very expensive shop there—indeed her whole costume, the light scarf round her neck, the stockings, shoes, gloves, gave to expert eyes the satisfaction of a subtle elegance that can only express itself in garments

which have been chosen without a moment's thought of their considerable cost. And, in shop phrase, she could "carry off" whatever she wore. "Oh, yes," one might imagine an assistant telling her, "Moddom has both the height and the carriage for it . . . " Certainly she had an easy poise, moving with assured steps and yet never ungracefully. Confident in herself she smiled pleasantly on the rest of the world, as is the custom with well-bred, unhampered people. The man, too, equally correct of attire from a masculine point of view, conveyed a similar impression of superiority to other members of the group. Taller than his wife, big and rather gaunt of frame, he moved more slowly than she, smiled less often, and offered in exchange for politeness a nonchalant acquiescence, a good-humoured, sympathetic acceptance of each proof of kind intentions.

But neither of them was a bit stuck up. All agreed as to this. They had made friends wherever they went. People *liked* the Lanes—especially Mrs. Lane. Really, as soon as you talked to her, a genial expansive soul! She met you more than halfway. Mr. Lane was much more reserved—even shy. But of course he had been an invalid. Mrs. Lane said so. Exactly what had been the matter with him she did not mention. But you could see she took care of him, and was watchful for his comfort on all occasions.

"Married long?"

This was a question put to the red-faced mother of the noisy daughter only two hours ago in the train.

"Oh, I should say so—quite an old married couple . . . Yet, when I think of it, Mrs. Lane said something that sounded as if they hadn't been married so very long."

Now, in the Greek theatre, the red-faced mother had mislaid her life's companion and she eagerly turned to their offspring for information.

"Where's your father, Mab? . . . Where can he have got to?"

"Oh, you may be sure daddy is bothering about a lot of

fiddle-faddle. He hasn't tumbled over the cliff," said the daughter, loud and unruffled. "Here he comes, puffing and blowing, but with triumph in his eye"; and she laughed. "Let's stand round and praise him."

Unfilially contemptuous and yet exact in her guesses she laughed again, for the perspiring old gentleman immediately asked for commendation.

"It's all right," he said cheerfully. "I've managed everything at the hotel. We're to have lunch at one sharp, and they'll give us a table in the window with the view . . . We must be in time though—because they expect a big Cook's party from some ship. They wanted to put us off at first. But I said I knew my way about too well for that, and when they saw I wouldn't stand any nonsense they became civil enough—yes, quite obsequious . . . So there we are. Large table—all together—in a window. But don't forget—one o'clock, sharp . . . Is that O.K.? . . . Suits you, Lane?"

"Topping," murmured Mr. Lane carelessly. "Many thanks."

"Daddy, stop being so ridiculous," said the daughter. "Come and look at things."

"Yes, yes, my dear. But business first, pleasure afterwards. That's my rule."

He was a kindly idiotic creature, this Major Clyst, fussing round Europe, preoccupied by the claims of matter and dull-eared to spiritual calls, thinking infinitely more of meals, beds, baths, lights, tips, than of natural wonders or historic remains. Such people have their use, and it is wrong to scoff at them if you benefit by their aid, though it be only for a day. Mr. Lane exchanged a tolerant smile with Mrs. Lane. Then he whispered to her:

"Let's cut this crowd and get to ourselves."

They could not, however, sever their connection with their companions at once.

"Oh, please, do you mind? Mrs. Lane, one minute." It

was the lady with the camera, "grouping" for a furtive snap, gently pushing one of them, forcibly pulling another, getting them into a compact bunch with the sunlight in their eyes. "Yes, I think I may venture, if I'm quick about it. That rather grumpy-looking guardian has gone down the steps"; and she retired backwards. "Mr. Lane, do you mind taking off your hat? . . . Mr. Maltby, please put down your sunshade. Hide that handkerchief, Major Clyst . . . Now! No. Where's Mrs. Brenner? Mrs. Brenner! . . . Mrs. *Bren-ner!*"

The lady of the sketch-book had perched herself higher up the arena and was already at work, doing rapid battle with a preposterously difficult perspective.

"I can't come down," she called from on high. "Leave me out."

The camera clicked. "No, please don't move. I'd like to do one more—in case of accidents. Now . . ." The shutter again made its instantaneous blink, and everyone was temporarily free.

"Yes, every prospect pleases and only man is vile," said Andrew, after drawing Margaret upward by the hand to a ledge at the very top of the arena, where the solid masonry met the soft turf, and wild flowers like incrusted jewels glowed in every crack or broken joint of the great slabs.

They stood side by side, drinking the perfumed air, saturating themselves with loveliness. Among invisible trees, birds made a song that seemed as light and pure as if the air itself were singing. The memory of a long morning's beauty lingered in their minds, so that they could see all they had seen together with what they were now seeing —groves of oranges and lemons, islands of grey rock floating mysteriously above mirrorless depths, churches and towns on inaccessible peaks shown in a flash and gone as though one had only dreamed of them, bewitching little

bays all white in the glare, with fishermen mending nets and the gaudily-painted prows of boats riding high as oars dipped and sparkled, hanging gardens, cascades of flowers —those lovely things past and yet here again, as perfect and clear as this immense panorama of mountains, sea, and sky, with Etna sleeping yet alive, majestic in its calm menace.

"Yes, this is all right," said Andrew, taking a deep breath and extending his arms in a gesture of wide embrace. "Very much O.K.—as the gallant major would say."

"There are two places that I have always heard never yet disappointed anybody—Venice and Taormina."

"You can *'ave* Venice," said Andrew, smiling. "Nasty smelly, drainy hole. But give me Taormina." Then after a pause he spoke seriously, almost anxiously. "Margaret, if things ever go wrong with us, bring me back here."

A cloud passed across her sunburnt face. It was the very first time that he had shown a lack of confidence or given the slightest hint of doubt as to the future. She answered him gaily and firmly.

"Nothing will go wrong with us."

"No—but if the luck went again, remember this is the place for me . . . I could earn my living here . . . drive an ox team . . . or join the fishermen."

"What nonsense . . . But I'll remember. If we go smash in England, Sicily it shall be."

They rejoined their crowd at the hotel that used to be a monastery, and the one o'clock meal was eaten in sufficient comfort except by busy Major Clyst, who felt doubtful now if they might not have done better in going to the other, the newer hotel. He suggested that they should try the other hotel for tea, and offered to make all necessary arrangements beforehand. The clergyman and his sister, however, questioned the possibility of sparing time for

tea without detriment to a full inspection of the Blue Grotto. Hitherto silent and easily controlled, they became almost obstreperous as they urged a general recognition of the grotto's claims.

"The grotto! . . . We can get boats to take us . . . Oh, do not believe a word of it if people have said the grotto is not worth visiting. People are so unconscientious, Mrs. Lane. They will say anything. I do implore you not to leave Taormina without seeing the grotto . . . Mr. Lane, don't allow yourself to be put off."

"Do you know, I'm afraid we must give the grotto a miss in baulk," said Mr. Lane indolently.

"The fact is," said Mrs. Lane, at once quick in his support, "my husband and I rather thought of getting a motor and driving back to Messina. That road by the sea seemed to be so delicious."

"Yes, no doubt. But the grotto *first.* Squeeze the grotto in *somehow.*"

"Well, we'll try—but I think my husband is a little tired."

Her husband! They had been married six months and still there was a thrill of pleasure whenever she said that word. She showed him off to strangers, she gloried in him. "Yes, my husband . . . I beg your pardon, have you seen my husband anywhere about?" She loved saying it, lingering on the word, caressing it. After a period of struggle and darkness that she had almost forgotten, the time of her real happiness had begun, and it went on. This honeymoon, extending into so many other moons, had been all interest, excitement, colour, joyous life, an experience of unsurpassable delight after those years of stagnation at the dull seaside town in England. They had gone as far east as Contantinople, as far south as Khartoum. They never

stayed long enough in one place to be tired of it. Before people's faces became too familiar they were looking at fresh faces.

It was a princely magnificent progress. They lived in the finest rooms of the grandest hotels. Cabins and railway carriages were reserved in advance for them. Motor-cars waited at their disposal. The best of everything was only good enough. Incidentally it was costing and had cost a frightful amount. Their outlay was fabulously high. Although he paid the heavier cheques, she herself often wrote cheques for current expenses, and already she had been obliged to send home an order to sell stock for the obliteration of a large overdraft. But if she ever spoke of these matters he looked bored, and then laughed good-humouredly.

"My affair," he would murmur. "Don't you worry."

She did not. She could not do two things at once. It was his welfare, not the cost of it, that counted with her. Besides, they would always have the bulk of her money to fall back upon.

For in all this time of her rapturous pleasure and unceasing amusement it was of him that she thought. In a moment all became empty, meaningless, if she fancied that things were not going well with him. "I can't find my husband. Have you seen him?" She asked her question and said the word in a very different tone, hurriedly, appealingly, when she began to feel anxious; and once at least during the earlier part of their wanderings he had scared her badly.

At Nice one evening, when she supposed him to be dressing for dinner, she opened the door of communication between the two rooms and spoke to him. He did not answer. He was not there. Downstairs a porter said that he had been seen leaving the hotel.

He had given the man no message for her. Doubtless he would return in a few minutes. But he did not. She waited

in growing anxiety, and as hour after hour passed an anguish of cold fear possessed her. She thought "It is the beginning of the end. He has relapsed, broken loose, given way to the old temptation." Terrible imaginings of vice and peril crowded upon her. Singularly ignorant of the world, devoid of any real experience, she created all such visions from material given to her by sensational modern books, but she blended them queerly with memories of the quiet English seaside town. Andrew had gone down to the harbour. It was the harbour at Westmouth where he had sought low company. Here at Nice the port would be the same meeting-place of wickedness, but dangerous on an immensely greater scale. He would fall among professional villains. They would take him into infamous drinking dens where sailors and girls danced in clouds of foul tobacco smoke to a gramophone that could scarcely be heard above the chorus of lewd song. They would lead him into worse purlieus—narrow streets of houses with an unmentionable name, where half-clad women hung out of windows beckoning the male passer-by. In a sordid little room, while one of these female wretches fawned on him, a frightful wrinkled hag would offer him a cup of drugged wine. Then the bullies—that was what they were called—would hit him with sandbags, stab him with knives, anything, and it would be all over. Those fierce cruel hands, rifling their prey, would snatch at note-case, gold cigarette-case, the pretty sleeve-links she bought for him in the rue de la Paix, and the wrist-watch she made him buy for himself only the other day at that shop in the Croisette at Cannes. Now out with the lights. Darkly, secretly, they would drag his insensible body, hoist it above a parapet, and let it fall . . .

"Oh no—no, no." Her teeth chattered, and she hid her mouth with a trembling hand. "No, I mustn't be foolish," she said to herself. "I won't believe . . . I'll keep quiet and behave sensibly." But she wanted to communicate this terror to other people; she wanted to cry out loudly for

help as she sat in the brilliantly-lighted vestibule, within sight of the vast outer doors, watching, quailing. "I'll wait till midnight. Then I'll go straight to the police."

Before twelve he returned. She ran forward to meet him. He seemed confused, but not guilty or ashamed.

"Sorry, you dear old thing, but I somehow forgot dinner. I hope you had your grub all right."

"No," she said. "But that's not of the slightest consequence. I wasn't hungry. Andrew, dear, where have you been?"

He said he had been walking about the streets. "I seemed to get dreamy. Honestly I couldn't tell you where I've been."

"Very well. Let's get some supper—before they close the restaurant."

"I don't think I feel hungry either. But I'm tired. Can I go to bed?" And as he looked at her his face had the wistful childlike expression which she never saw without a swift overwhelming emotion that in an instant swept her joyous passionate love into a wide stream of pity and pain. "I say. You're not angry with me, are you?"

"My darling—as if," she said brokenly, "as if I could ev-ever be angry with you."

It needed all her strength to prevent herself from clasping him, kissing him, hugging him, even in that public place.

This incident, shaking her at the time, finally served to reassure her. After it he often used to go for long solitary tramps. He needed exercise. With the restoration of natural vigour there came considerable restlessness. But now it was *bodily* restlessness. His mind seemed to be at peace.

She trusted him. She trusted herself. Her faith in the future grew stronger on every one of these heavenly days.

The miracle had been vouchsafed. Shock—total abstinence—gradual recovery of physical health! These were the three steps in the marvellous progress towards regeneration. From the hour when, sitting beside that friendly doctor in his bustling little car, she had heard them named as stages of a possible cure she had prayed for their accomplishment, and a merciful, a gloriously kind Fate had permitted her to seize the chance of them, to push forward their beneficent action.

As she watched him enter a coffee-room or come towards her on a sunlit terrace her thoughts were prayers of thanksgiving. Her heart raced, her blood danced. Joy and pride lit up the whole universe for her. He moved firmly, erectly, no slouching or stooping; in his well-made blue flannels, soft collar, black tie, neat highly-polished shoes, he looked so completely the cultured man of the world that she had wished him to seem, that she had known he ought to be; the handsomeness, the noble air, the aristocratic manner had come out of the darkness into the light, just as if they had been neglected treasures packed away in common soiled wrappings that she had torn off one after another with her skilled and resolute hands. It was she who had made him like this, rediscovering him, remodelling him.

Truly a marvellous achievement. Within as well as without, he was a new man. He had been a drunkard, and now with people all round him drinking he did not want to drink; he had been a gambler, and yet he could lounge about the roulette and baccarat tables at Monte Carlo without wanting to risk a louis, an amused onlooker, the cynical critic of a folly that had been his own; he had been profligate in regard to women, hunting them, promiscuously consorting with them, and now the prettiest woman in the world could not make him turn his eyes from the woman who had become his adoring companion, his legitimate mistress, his dutiful wife. She thought rapturously,

"It is I who have worked the change in him. He owes it all to me. My love has done it for him."

But her own transformation was only less great than his. Mirrors were friends now, not enemies as they used once to be; they drew her to them instead of making her shrink from the implacably hostile revelation that they would offer. Standing in front of a big glass, as she had once done in her bedroom at home, she smiled at all it showed her, turning her body, looking over her shoulder, posing as if for a fashionable portrait painter. Each new dress became her more admirably than the last. "Yes," she thought, "it is easy to look smart, and not too hideous, if you are happy."

Completely devoid of conceit, yet delighting in the improvement of her appearance, perhaps more for Andrew's sake than her own, saying to herself, "I have a handsome companion and thank Heaven I don't disgrace him," she would sometimes ask him leading questions, as artlessly fishing for compliments as if she had been a girl of sixteen and he her boy sweetheart.

"Andrew, dear, I have never worn this before. Is it all right?"

"I should rather think it is. Ripping!" And he looked at her with fond attention. "Don't blush. Honestly, my dear, you're becoming an absolute knock-out."

After receiving such a testimonial, she sailed into any crowded assembly of strangers with the splendid confidence of an admiral's flagship going through the lines at a naval review. Let them look. If they weren't pleased she didn't mind a hang. Andrew and the looking-glass had conveyed approval.

Of course she could talk to people nowadays. Why not? That too had grown to be so easy. But the exercise of the new power was another source of lively pleasure to her.

Moreover, in being friendly with strangers she had, as in everything else, purposive action for Andrew's good. She drew him into all the casual intercourse with their

fellow-travellers, and saw that he was well content so long as all these background figures remained essentially unknown, to be encountered once or twice and not again. But if it happened that anybody tried to connect the present and the past, recoiling immediately, he fell into a morose silence. Thus a man once asked him if he had not been at York just before the war. This person felt sure that they had met somewhere. Then he spoke of that cousin of Andrew's, Sir Jerome Burnett.

Andrew retired into himself, after answering coldly and dully, if not uncivilly.

It was as if he refused to look behind him, or had actually forgotten every series of events in his youth and in his more recent manhood. As a most surprising instance of this peculiarity, he never spoke of Ena Talbot or even alluded indirectly to memories of her existence. Margaret was ready to talk of her. She had prepared the phrases that she would now use. But none of them were ever needed. At first she was glad that he refrained, although wondering greatly. Then his persistent reticence troubled her. It was strange—at least far from natural—in view of Margaret's complete knowledge. He could have nothing to hide with her.

Nevertheless she felt no fear. This and one or two other things demanded assiduous care. They would come right in the end, but they were not right yet. His submission to her wishes was much too certain. He had no will of his own. From the very beginning of the honeymoon she had watched for a distinct exercise of volition. But it had not shown itself.

Although she allowed people to believe so, it was not he who mapped out routes, telegraphed for apartments, and decided on their next destination. He was never the leader, but always the led. He remained passive even when she asked him to choose between two places.

"I leave it all to you, old girl."

"No, but which?"

"Ça m'est bien égal, je t'assure," he said, smiling at her lazily. "Fais ton choix. Je l'approuve d'avance."

He talked French well—as she did too. But his accent was better than hers.

From Sicily they returned to Naples. They were to go home from there by sea. But the day before their ship sailed he had a high temperature, with a violent headache and pains in the limbs. She put him to bed, summoned a doctor, and then ran out to change their cabins for a later date.

It was influenza, rapid in its attack but as rapidly yielding to treatment. She nursed him through it and had him fit to travel in a fortnight. They preferred, however, to let a second boat sail without them, and to spin out his lazy convalescence a little longer.

Those days alone with him in the shabby bedroom of a not too well managed hotel were perhaps the happiest of their tour. In his weakness he seemed closer to her mentally than he had ever been. Vague barriers that had separated them seemed to have fallen. She had an illusion that she could read his thoughts and that he often knew what she was thinking of. Sometimes he startled her by answering a question that, formed in her mind, had remained unspoken.

It would have seemed impossible that she could love him more, and yet she did. When he recovered strength and she was able to take him out, to resume the easy sunlit life of care-free tourists, the emotion that he aroused in her became almost too great to bear. But his response to this rebirth of her passion gave her a rapture that consumed like fire and yet appeased like tranquil rest. It seemed to

her that she had made him hers for the second time, that hitherto their union had been incomplete, inadequate, unsatisfying. Now they two were truly one.

Her eyes fed on him. Awake or asleep he filled the whole field of her vision, so that she had to wrench herself violently away before she could see anything else—the walls of the room, the broad bay, the distant hills, the transparent sky. Often she watched him asleep. His face had a hollow in each cheek, and the temples were a little hollowed; his chin was firm and strong, and the beautifully modelled mouth closely shut even in sleep; all round his closed eyelids there were tiny little lines; a few grey hairs showed among the thick dark clusters on the forehead. He was beautiful. Watching him, yearning over him, she felt her love widen into a sea that drew its force from many different rivers. She was his mother as well as his wife. He was her child who had been sick but was now well. And yet he was her father too—her rescuer, her saviour. Oh, if either should feel gratitude to the other, it was she, not he. She was nothing, an empty shell, a fruitless sterile thing without light or warmth ever touching it, until he drew her into movement, until he pulled her cold face towards the sun. She had had no true feelings till he made her feel. With fear and desire and frantic repinings, through horror and shame, he had dragged her out of herself, raised her above herself, and given her fulfilment, perfected purpose, completion, as a strong ardent woman in the hands of a chosen mate.

"I don't want to fuss. But put this cloak round you, darling . . . Have the rug over your knees. Remember, it gets cold as soon as the sun goes down."

She wrapped him up, she fussed over him, as they came homeward after long drives. The weather was glorious. The southern springtide flowed for them in waves of flowers. The very names of the places they visited were themselves lovely—Sorrento, Amalfi, Castellammare.

And from time to time he said wonderful things to her, unexpected, enchanting, such things as he had never said till now.

"Life can be very like a fairy-tale, Margaret. I think our life is. Beauty and the Beast! Eh? But in *our* version it was the Beast who slept and the Princess came and waked him."

"Andrew—my own, my dearest." She was clutching at his hand beneath the rug, crushing it in her joy. "If you talk like that you'll simply make me cry."

Yes, she loved him more intensely. He affected her more invincibly. His voice by itself was able to control her, to govern her. Notes of it vibrated deep inside her.

"Now that we are alone for a minute," said Mr. Yardley, beaming at her, "let me into the secret. How's it done? Did you two young people break the bank at Monte Carlo? Or have you already managed to make up the quarrel with Sir Jerome?"

"Of course not," said Margaret, puzzled. "I don't know what you mean."

"Well, the marvellous travels! They must have cost a bit. And I imagine they don't let you live here for nothing."

Mr. Yardley had come to dine with them in their suite of rooms at a Mayfair hotel. Now the meal was over. They had had it up here, instead of descending to the restaurant, so that they might enjoy Mr. Yardley's company in quiet. Andrew had been called away to answer some message about a horse.

"No," said Margaret, "this isn't the cheapest of hotels. You think we're being extravagant. We *are*. That's something I want to get your advice about . . . But tell me again. What you said of Andrew just now—you really meant all that?"

"Every word. It surpasses belief."

"Yes, doesn't it," said Margaret, her eyes glowing. "And he doesn't *act*, you know. He's always like this."

"My dear girl," said Mr. Yardley, with feeling, "no words can say how much I admire you, and respect you, for what you have done. Not one woman in a million could have shown such courage—such strength of mind. Truly you have done a big deed. But you must have gone through a great deal."

"It wasn't plain sailing at first. I had a baddish time

with him when we came to London. But the improvement began as soon as we left England. Since then he has made everything easy for me."

"He has? Splendid."

At this moment Andrew returned to the room.

"Do I intrude?" He said this smilingly, and yet with a suggestion of constraint and discomfort. "Talking about me, weren't you?"

"Nothing to your disparagement," said Mr. Yardley gaily. "Rather the reverse. Your Lady wife praises you as a travelling companion."

They continued to lead an altogether frivolous life. To her it was another new world. The brightness of London in early summer, all of its factitious gaiety, theatres, fashionable restaurants, the music, the dancing, everything charmed her. They spent week-ends at Le Touquet. Once or twice he took her to race-meetings. Whatever he liked she pretended to like too.

For he was beginning now to show preferences and dislikes. She encouraged him in every fancy. Then gradually he began to talk of that vast chapter of his life which still remained unknown to her. This was what she had longed to see, the breakdown of an impenetrable reserve or the recovery from a quite abnormal forgetfulness.

At last he uttered the suppressed name. He had been speaking of a fishing expedition to Norway, and he added, in a perfectly natural tone, "That was when I was by myself—before I met my poor Ena."

Margaret said nothing, but she laid her hand on his as a token of sympathy and comprehension.

"Yes, poor little Ena," he murmured.

Then, after this, it was as if a locked door had been thrown wide open. Wherever they went he made some link

with the present moment and his past years. He showed her a shop in Bond Street over which he had had rooms at one time. He described a winter during which he and two other men had hunted in Northamptonshire, sharing a little house together. He told her all about his cousin's place in Yorkshire, where he used to stay as an adopted son of the house. Laughing himself and making her laugh, he recounted Sir Jerome's foibles and eccentricities.

He was charming, amusing, altogether delightful as he chattered of things done, places seen, men and women encountered; and she, listening avidly, recalling Mr. Yardley's tale, tried to fit in each new detail and to build up his complete life-history. Every word was precious to her. With each of them he was allowing her to have a little more of him than she had hitherto possessed.

"Sure I don't bore you with all this?"

"No. How can you ask? I simply love it."

"Then here are some more of my twaddling reminiscences. One summer I chartered a Thames barge and smuggled a lot of tobacco across the Channel."

"Oh, how naughty of you, Andrew."

"It was rather fun—and they never caught us. We had some narrow squeaks, though."

To chatter in this style visibly did him good. Again she had the thought that he was like a prisoner who has been perforce silent during the term of a long sentence. His eyes grew bright; his voice, always musical, took a deeper note and firmer tone, and when laughter came, as it always did, his face had a gentleness, a kindly good-humour that seemed to her a revelation, or rather a confirmation of the basic worth of his nature.

Yet she saw now plainly that he often suffered from a sense of shame, and that bygone disgrace weighed heavily on his spirits. In the midst of voluble laughing talk he would falter and seem to be overcome with painful diffidence. For instance, one day in the restaurant of their hotel,

he said with clouded downcast eyes, "Don't look over there, and let's finish our lunch and get away as quick as we can."

"Why?" she asked.

"There are some people that I used to know."

She understood that he was ashamed; and on this and many other occasions she worked hard to restore his self-respect, to give him a new confidence. It pained her grievously to think that even now he still regarded himself an an outcast from the world to which he properly belonged. Long association with his inferiors had made him waive all claims to consideration or even tolerance from his equals.

One day as they were walking up St. James's Street he hastened his pace in passing beneath the big windows of a well-known club.

"I used to be a member of that pot-house."

"Really? Do tell me about it. It looks a nice place. Why did you give it up?"

"I left because of a row—some infernal humbug about a rule. Oh, they *wanted* to get rid of me. They were all against me;" and he gave a bitter little laugh. "So I saved them trouble by banging in my resignation."

"How disgusting of them," said Margaret indignantly. "But no doubt you were right to show your contempt for them. Now you ought to join another club."

He laughed again. "Perhaps I ought—if you could tell me the name of a club that I shouldn't be pilled for."

"What nonsense," said Margaret, with greater indignation. "What utter nonsense. Any decent club would be delighted to get you as a member."

"That's fine, old dear. With you on the committee, I should get *one* white ball, shouldn't I? . . . Bless your kind heart and blind faith."

Another day, when they were at Hurlingham, she forced him to speak to a man that he confessed he had once

known quite well. Reluctant as a shy child he obeyed her. The man was quite pleasant to him, and when introduced to Margaret she read in his face and manner the relief that he felt. He had feared that he was going to be bothered, but now finding Andrew all prosperous and respectable he could afford without risk to be polite and friendly.

She saw, too, that the success of the experiment had been beneficial to Andrew.

His confidence increased. But she believed that it failed him as soon as he had not her bodily presence to support it. He was so completely dependent on her that he seemed never to wish her out of his sight. He went with her everywhere—to shops, dressmakers, even to the hairdresser's. Once she had dreaded his giving her the slip, getting away from her on the sly, falling into danger or temptation. Now the difficulty was to be alone, to do anything unobserved by him, to steal an hour for any private affairs.

For the good of his health she had prevailed on him to ride in the Park, and these morning rides gave her the only chance of liberty. But habitually she went out to watch and admire him. Without understanding the art, she saw that he had a good seat on a horse. He looked grand, noble, as he came cantering along and drew rein or turned with a swing close to the rail where she stood waiting. Nobody in all the Row looked finer than her own splendid, faithful, smiling horseman. It was after exchanging a few words with him, waving her hand, and watching him ride away that she went straight to the offices of a firm of solicitors in Sackville Street and had a confidential interview with the senior partner.

She told him that she was very anxious for her husband to join a club.

"Oh," said Mr. Yardley doubtfully, "would that be a wise move?"

"Yes, I think so. I am sure. He needs men's society. And I thought that perhaps you could propose him for a

really good club where he would be certain to get in. I can't have him blackballed on any account."

"No, no." Mr. Yardley considered the matter. He himself was a member of several clubs, and after a little reflection he said he believed he could get Andrew into one of them, the Napier, without difficulty or delay.

"Is the Napier a good club?"

"Yes, my dear;" and Mr. Yardley smiled at the promptness of her question. "How shall I describe it fairly and truthfully? Shall we say not absolutely first-class but really good second-class? And thoroughly respectable. Not in the least rowdy or flashy."

"That sounds all right."

"And the attraction is this. Like many other excellent clubs they are short of members and have temporarily suspended the entrance fee. You want the thing done quickly. If I put him down now I think I can answer for his election within a very few weeks."

"Thousands of thanks. You are always so kind . . . But one thing more. Will you write to Andrew and make him the offer as if it was entirely your own idea?"

Mr. Yardley said he was quite willing to do this, and then they talked of money. She told her old friend that she was well aware that they were living far beyond their means. Yet if she asked Andrew whether they could afford any particular outlay, he said yes. All that was his affair. She was not to worry, but leave it to him. She explained that on the Continent she had contributed occasionally to their joint expenses, but here in London he had refused to take anything from her. He said he had plenty of money himself.

"That isn't true, you know," said Mr. Yardley, looking grave and distressed.

"He always *seems* to have a lot, ready to produce at any moment."

"I fear you mustn't trust to appearances;" and Mr.

Yardley spoke with enhanced seriousness. Andrew, he said, was Andrew. One could not expect from him any reasonable attitude towards money. For him it was like water or gas—you turned on the tap and let it flow or burn. While money was available he would spend it. He had never differentiated in the slightest degree between capital and income. During this last year he had received the proceeds of the sale of the Westmouth house and also something for the sale of other houses on which he had already borrowed money. In Mr. Yardley's mind there was little doubt that all these sums were being dissipated. One could only hope that the remarkable reformation in other respects might eventually make him take a saner view of life in this direction also. If Margaret could pull him up short——

"I can't," said Margaret very earnestly. "I am between the devil and the deep sea. For I simply must keep him amused and occupied. Of course this isn't really occupation. It is only passing the time. What I want is to see him fully engaged, with mind and body both actively employed. Yes, that's what I hope to bring about sooner or later."

"Let it be sooner rather than later," said Mr. Yardley. "But *how*, my dear?"

Then she said that it should be possible to buy a business or a partnership in a business, and she would not hesitate to use her own money for such a purpose. But it would have to be arranged so that Andrew did not know of her intervention.

Mr. Yardley would not hear of this. He said that Margaret must hang on to her own little money like grim death. It *was* little enough, he assured her, when measured by the bare necessities of her new situation in life. No doubt it had seemed ample at Westmouth; but Westmouth and London were two very different places. She would probably need the strictest economy to retain it intact; but that was what at all hazards she must sternly set herself to do.

In the kindest and most benign manner, but with pleasant satisfaction in a wisdom derived from long experience, he lectured her on the duties of those who are so fortunate as to possess private means, whether handsome or modest. Mr. Micawber's aphorism was the one safe guide. Income twenty pounds per annum, annual expenditure twenty-one pounds, or twenty pounds sixpence halfpenny—and you are done for. The moment you cease to live within your means you are on the downward slope. No one at first can believe the rapidity of the descent. And he told her, as a case in point, about one of his clients, Lord Cheriton, who came into ninety thousand a year and had now got through practically the whole of his property by the simple process of spending more than he had. No great losses, no disasters—merely attrition.

"Above all, beware of Andrew's influence. Don't think me unkind in saying this of him. You know all I feel for him. But he would speedily confirm the lesson I'm trying to teach. If you ever allow him, he will show you how a small competence can be squandered as easily as a large fortune."

Some days after this, as they sat at breakfast reading their letters, Andrew uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"What is it?" She looked at him smilingly, and asked if he had received any good news.

"No. But it's funny. You know what you were saying about clubs. Well, old Yardley has written saying he wants me to join the Napier."

"Oh, but I do call that good news. You'll accept, of course."

"No—I don't think so."

"Surely that will be a pity. What does he say exactly?"

"He says they'll take me without an entrance fee;" and Andrew frowned, then laughed. "No doubt they're pretty hard up for members when it comes down to me."

"Why should you suppose that? No—nothing of the kind. *I* think it's terribly nice of Mr. Yardley. You'll huff him if you refuse. Besides, I should like it. I feel certain that having a club would be useful."

"In what way?" And he looked at her questioningly, as if not pleased with her last words. "Somewhere for you to shuffle me off?"

"Andrew!"

"If I did join, I don't suppose I should go there often . . . Still as you say—— Anyhow, I'll think it over."

"That's right," said Margaret cheerfully. "And now I've had good news too. A letter from mother! She'll be in London to-morrow."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and she's coming to see me. Wonders will never cease! Oh, but I *am* glad."

"I'm glad you're glad," he said, as politely as coldly.

"It means of course that we make it up at last . . . And listen, all those cousins that I told you of—the Halletts, and the Bickersdykes—want to make friends with us. Mother says so."

"Very kind and condescending of them," said Andrew.

"Oh, you'll see they're quite nice. You'll like them." Then she finished reading her mother's letter.

On Margaret's departure from Westmouth, not unaccompanied, as all the world knew, Mrs. Dacre made a bolt herself, in order to escape the largest scandal that the place had ever revelled in. All tongues would be set going, and she really could not face their music. With her devoted friend Mrs. Randall and her faithful servant Mead she retired to Bath, and there remained indefinitely. It was a good strategic move, because her absence robbed the

scandalmongers of half their enjoyment; since they naturally wished, in sympathetic interviews with the principal sufferer, to rub into her wounds some nice friendly pepper and vinegar, and to watch the effect while they made her smart afresh. "We are so sorry for you, dear Mrs. Dacre. It is too hard on you . . . If you only heard all the horrid things people are saying . . . Poor Mrs. Dacre. I say to everybody, you can't pretend it's *her* fault."

Poor Mrs. Dacre herself derived little comfort from having thwarted them to this extent. And time as it passed was slow to bring her any peace of mind. Westmouth, unable to talk to her, wrote her long letters full of tender inquiries. "What can I tell them?" she wailed. "To say that Margaret has gone with him unmarried is impossible. Yet to confess that they have married so soon after that other person's death is even worse. She has left me on the horns of the ugliest dilemma a mother ever suffered."

Gradually, however, it seemed that the horns of her dilemma ceased to give her acute anguish. She sat them more easily. They scarcely hurt at all. Life was not unpleasant at Bath. Every day she made that good kind old Mrs. Randall more completely her slave, she worked Mead very hard, she surrounded herself with a little circle of friends who knew nothing of Mr. Lane and cared less.

At last she returned to The Gables and met the old world with a brave face. Nothing in the loved abode had been altered. The servants there, weary of board wages and idleness, took kindly to the Randall régime. All went on again as if there had not been anything unusual, much less a catastrophic upheaval, to disturb the smooth routine of a well-managed household.

"Then you really are reconciled?" Mrs. Meadows asked her. "I am indeed pleased;" and Mrs. Meadows forced a smile to conceal her disappointment. "May I tell people that you now approve?"

"By all means," said Mrs. Dacre, "if they are good

enough to take an interest;" and she too smiled, making a gesture with her thin white hand to indicate philosophic contentment. "I would not say that Margaret and I see things altogether in the same light, or that I would have made the choice she has. But you cannot have old heads on young shoulders."

"Just so . . . Do you know where they are now? Or is it a secret?"

"Of course I know. And why should it be a secret? They are in Italy." And Mrs. Dacre spoke of the delightful experiences that her daughter and her son-in-law were enjoying down there. "Margaret tells me it is all so charming that they cannot tear themselves away."

"Oh, you correspond with her?"

"Certainly I do."

This was not untrue. During the winter several letters had been exchanged between the two. It had become necessary to communicate with Margaret on matters of business—among other things, the collection from Margaret of a largish cheque for domestic charges up to the date of the smash that terminated their partnership. But Mrs. Dacre had written these unavoidable letters in a style that was more than cold, as though to an avowed enemy, and although Margaret on the other hand used terms of effusive affection in replying, she had neither thawed nor relaxed the attitude of implacable resentment when she next took up her pen.

But now, making the best of things for the benefit of Westmouth, and almost implying that Margaret on the whole had done rather well for herself, she was offered another dilemma. Compelled to announce that Mr. and Mrs. Lane were back in England, she was plied with questions as to their actual address, their way of life, their state of health, and so on. Moreover, relatives in London bothered her with amicable inquiries about the married couple.

It became obvious to Mrs. Dacre that her story of recon-

ciliation must fail and her own position become untenable unless she did something convincing. Otherwise people would openly disbelieve her. If satisfied with Margaret's conduct, why hold her at arm's length? If your daughter is not in disgrace, but occupying a legitimate and respected situation in society, why do you continue to be entirely separated from her?

At a small tea-party, then, Mrs. Dacre asked if she could convey any oral messages to Margaret in London.

"Oh," cried Lady Rogers, mightily surprised, "are you really going to see her?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dacre, with an air of sprightly complaisance, "next Thursday. It is my first chance."

"Give her my love," said Lady Rogers.

"And mine . . . And mine . . . Mine too," said other friends.

"It is this afternoon that mother is coming."

"Oh, is it?" said Andrew dully.

"Yes—about four. And all I want to say is this. You'll be indulgent? You'll make allowances, won't you? I mean, you won't mind if she says things that aren't quite tactful?"

"No, I won't," he said curtly, "and for the best of all reasons. I shan't hear them."

"Andrew! What do you mean? You can't mean that you won't be here to receive her?"

"That's what I do mean. You've guessed it in once."

"Oh no;" and Margaret's distress was evident. "You couldn't be so unkind—to me as well as to her. Think. She *is* my mother."

"I can't help that."

"And what should I say—what would she think?"

"I don't care a brass farthing what she thinks." He said

this so roughly that the blood ebbed from Margaret's face and she gave a gasp in her consternation. "Why the deuce should I put myself to trouble for her?"

"For me, Andrew, dear, if not for her," said Margaret, in a gentle deprecating tone, pallidly staring at him. It was the first time since their marriage that he had spoken harshly to her. "Surely it isn't a great sacrifice. Can't you make it for my sake?"

Then for a few moments he was terrifyingly like what he had been at the beginning of things. He lost his temper. Loudly, coarsely, aggressively, he said he was sick of being trotted out and shown off before people. He laid no claim to hyper-sensitiveness, but he wasn't going to be humiliated in that way again. "No—not much! Tell your own yarns to the old——lady." After the pause he shouted the last word so loudly that he made it seem almost as unpardonable as the opprobrious term that he had barely avoided using. "But you shan't have me on view like a Pekinese dog or a tame monkey, and then directly my back is turned to say, 'What do you think of him? Doesn't he behave nicely? Isn't he quiet and well trained?'—as you did to old Yardley when he came to dinner. Yes, you did—directly I went out of the room."

"Andrew, that's enough—more than enough," said Margaret, recovering firmness of tone and with the blood now reddening her face. "I couldn't have believed—but it doesn't matter. Consider yourself quite free this afternoon. I withdraw my request. I beg you to get your tea anywhere you please—anywhere but here."

She spoke with firmness, but she was cruelly wounded.

Still feeling shattered and unhappy after this stormy scene, she sat waiting, and it seemed to her that a total stranger had entered the room. Her mother's kiss was so

light, so cold, so entirely a ceremonious salute, that it seemed to tell her she had never really been cherished or valued. Words of happy greeting were stifled. When she spoke there was neither warmth nor joy in the sound of her voice.

"How good of you, mummy. Punctual to the minute."

"Yes, I said four o'clock, didn't I? I have come straight from the Army and Navy Stores."

Margaret rang a bell.

"We'll have tea at once. Do sit down": and Margaret indicated the sofa as the best seat and one on which they could sit together.

"Thank you, dear . . . But here, if you please. With my back to the light," and Mrs. Dacre seated herself stiffly on a high chair that faced the door.

Margaret drew a similar chair from the wall and sat opposite to her.

"Very much is altered," said Mrs. Dacre placidly, after glancing round the room. "Not at all what I remember years ago."

"What are you speaking of, mother? This hotel?"

"No, dear, the Stores. They have made great alterations, improvements, no doubt. But they keep the same atmosphere. As you know, I have always pinned my faith on the A. and N. . . . Do you and Mr. Lane deal there?"

"Yes——no, not yet," said Margaret, embarrassed and troubled. "Mother dear, I have to apologise for Andrew's absence. I'm so sorry, but it was impossible for him—this afternoon."

Mrs. Dacre smiled and nodded, and murmured a few polite words to the effect that she readily excused Mr. Lane.

"Of course I wanted so much to bring you together," said Margaret uncomfortably.

"Some other day, my dear. Then I shall be charmed to meet Mr. Lane."

"And you really must not call him Mr. Lane . . . Andrew!"

"Yes—oh yes, if he permits me. But do not forget that so far I only know him by sight . . . Well now. *En attendant*, it is very nice to have you all to myself, for we can——" Mrs. Dacre stopped speaking, raised her eyebrows, and made a fluttered movement with her hands.

The door had opened.

"Bring tea, please," said Margaret, without looking round, and supposing it was the waiter. Then she saw her mother's perturbation.

For it was not the waiter. It was Andrew. Margaret timidly introduced him. She understood at once the reason of this unexpected appearance. Contrite, full of regret for his rough words, wanting to show he was sorry, determined to make things all right without delay, he had come hurrying here. She was touched, grateful; but she wished that he had changed his mind earlier, or not changed it at all.

The interview, difficult before, became now fantastic, impossible.

"We were talking of the Army and Navy Stores," said Mrs. Dacre. "Margaret asked me where I had been, and I told her I had come straight from there."

And this absurd chatter about the Stores continued. It was as if Mrs. Dacre felt that she had found the one safe subject in a whirl of perilous material for discourse; and she clung to it tenaciously. But of the three of them none seemed able to say any of the rational and expected things that would have been suitable to the occasion.

Tea was brought into the room; and Mrs. Dacre, taking a second cup and consenting to nibble another small piece of cake, resumed her ridiculous theme.

"Nowadays they have a very large confectionery department. I did not visit the *Toys!*" Saying this she

laughed and looked archly at Margaret. "Do you remember the clock-work train your father bought you there?" And she turned to Andrew. "She *would* have a train. I said, 'Oh, but a train is a little boy's toy, not a little girl's.' Then her father, who never as a rule interfered, said, 'Let her have what she wants.' And off we went—do you remember, Margaret? Very, very rarely did my husband accompany us anywhere—he was too busy and fully occupied. But Margaret even as a little child liked to go shopping with me. The A. and N. was our great haunt. That's what we called it. The A. and N. . . . Or 'The 'Tores!' That's what *you* called it, Margaret. . . . 'Mummy,' she would say, directly she heard the car come to the door; 'Mummy, are we going to the 'Tores this afternoon?'"

After not a great number of minutes it became too much for Andrew. He had borne himself finely, with the courteous, amiable air of a man of the world whom nothing can disconcert or annoy unless it be an intentional affront. Now he rose from his chair, and said that he must tear himself away or he would be late for an appointment. He added a conventional but not unfriendly expression of his pleasure in making Mrs. Dacre's acquaintance.

It was a good exit. But instead of completing it he suddenly came from the doorway and stood behind Margaret's chair. Then he put his hands on her shoulders. They lay there very gently, and her pleasure and comfort in this caress was immense. As though their rôles had been for once reversed, he was giving her strength and assurance.

"Your daughter," he said quietly, "is an angel, Mrs. Dacre. Try to think I'm not quite the devil."

"*What* an idea!" said Mrs. Dacre, as if the idea was quaint and amusing, and not an extremely probable one. "Oh, dear me," and she nodded and smiled. "What an idea!"

Margaret whispered a "thank you" as he moved away again, and watched him till the door closed.

Whatever disappointment she might suffer in other respects, he had made her feel that their love was secure and unthreatened. Nothing now could hurt her. The dreadful wound inflicted this morning was more than healed. All that sense of bitter doubt, sadness, forlorn dejection which had been weighing her down for hours was gone. She felt light of heart, happy. How dear, how sweet he had been; how quick in his effort to wipe out, to expiate, to prove that he would never fail her when a real test came!

She was able now to talk to her mother with comparative ease, although she sought vainly for any renewal of the affectionate intercourse that had prevailed between them.

Not perhaps intentionally, Mrs. Dacre seemed to be telling her all the time that she had got on exceedingly well without her. She did not, when describing life at Westmouth, utter one word of regret at the loss of Margaret's company. She spoke of Mrs. Randall with lavish praise. So considerate, so cheerful. "*That* was an inspiration indeed—for us two to join forces." In the spring, when they were about to leave Bath, a very nasty thing happened. The faithful Mead crocked up. "It was vein trouble—in the leg—brought on by standing, the doctor said—and quite serious. I had to bundle her off to the hospital. But most providentially, I found a really good maid to look after me temporarily. Jarvis. Elizabeth Jarvis. A married woman; but separated from her husband. Honestly, I have never been so comfortable as I was while Jarvis remained with me. *Better*—yes, truly better. I am keeping in touch with her. For, if Mead's health should break down altogether—as is quite on the cards—I shall know where to look."

She sat chatting in this manner for a long time. It was all about herself, and there were no further allusions to

the Army and Navy Stores. She said nothing of her redoubtable son-in-law. And she asked no questions about Margaret's future plans.

"Oh, by the way," she said, as if suddenly remembering. "Lady Rogers sent you her love—and the others. I told you—didn't I?—that the Bickersdykes want you to dine with them. I gave them this address."

Throughout the visit she was really little more than a polite but uninterested stranger. Then at the very end for two or three moments she became again her daughter's mother. When she rose to go, a great trouble and tenderness overwhelmed Margaret. They embraced, and the feel of her garments, a faint perfume of violets, the bodily contact, brought a thousand memories into the swelling heart of Margaret, so that she clung to the frail thin old woman in a paroxysm of elemental affection.

"Come and see me as often as you can, mother."

"Well, well, it may be difficult," said Mrs. Dacre, with a queer detached sort of compassion. "We make our beds, and we must lie upon them."

"But my bed is lovely," Margaret withdrew her clinging arms, and, eyes moist, lips twitching, spoke in jerks: "I assure you I'm amazingly happy."

"Darling girl," said Mrs. Dacre. "I will try to think so."

Those cousins in due course made hospitable overtures, and it was Andrew, not Margaret, who insisted that all such invitations should be accepted. Conventionally and correctly he dined with Mr. and Mrs. Hallett at South Kensington, and a few days later with Colonel and Mrs. Bickersdyke in Lowndes Square. But that terribly dull dinner-party was the last of the kind that they attended.

Margaret, looking at him down the long table, felt

proud of him, but saw that he was bored to death. He lapsed into silences, answered at random, desperately suppressed incipient yawns. Before the end of the evening he might have fallen asleep altogether if it had not been for the daughter of the house. Dorothy Bickersdyke, a jolly, free-and-easy girl of twenty-five, kept him awake.

After this Margaret told him that he had done his duty, and he should not be tormented again.

"I'm quite ready to go on."

"No, dear, you have been a hero and a martyr."

Margaret, however, had made a close alliance with Dorothy Bickersdyke, and the girl brought them many new friends. The dullness of her parents was a fact that she openly deplored, but at least they gave her freedom to amuse herself in her own way. The people with whom she habitually consorted were girls, like herself not very young, and married women of about the same age. They were all nice to look at, very bright, and very smart too, although, as Margaret understood clearly, belonging neither to the real world of fashion, nor to the best class of ordinary society. Each of them had a man or two in regular attendance.

Andrew seemed to like these people. He was at ease in their company. So it happened that as the month of July drew towards the end of London's annual frivolities they had a feverish succession of gay evenings with them. Together they formed theatre parties, and afterwards went to restaurants and so-called clubs to eat supper, not because they were hungry, but for more gaiety, more music. Dorothy arranged these parties, and the Lanes paid for them.

One night, at a restaurant noted for the rhythm of its band and the smoothness of its dancing floor, Andrew seemed to have made a gratifying conquest of an unescorted married woman. It was the first time they had met her. She told Margaret that he was delightful, and they

were getting on famously. Then, having praised him to his wife, she praised his wife to him. They were sitting together at the deserted supper-table while Margaret and the rest of the party danced.

Margaret's dancing was very different from her performance in the past. No one now could call her stiff. Yielding to each slight pressure of her partner, following his movements as if by instinct, she swept round the floor among the crowd of gyrating couples, as if a part of the dance and not merely joining in it.

"Your wife is a very attractive woman." said Andrew's companion.

"Yes, isn't she?" he said absently.

"I love her quiet way. . . . She knows her own value, and yet she isn't in the least conceited. But you feel that nobody could take a liberty with her. I do like dignity in people—perhaps because I haven't enough of it myself"; and the pretty young woman laughed.

Andrew, silent, absorbed, sat looking at her. She was smooth, soft, graceful, with dark bold eyes that made her gentle and rather shy manner seem entirely unnatural. Her lips were pursed up beneath the two heavy daubs of red colour. But when she smiled or laughed her mouth widened as it opened and became in a transient flash a large, provocative, impudent invitation. She leaned towards him, smiling now.

"I say. Have I got a smut on my nose?"

He did not answer.

"Mr. Lane, you mustn't stare at me like that. Why are you doing it?"

He did not seem to hear what she said, and she repeated the question.

He stammered."Sorry. I don't know what I was thinking of."

But he did know really. He had thought that she need not be taking so much trouble to tell him she was loose-

lived, unfaithful to her husband, unfaithful to her lovers, without scruples or regrets, seeking pleasure and taking it whenever and however she could find it. He had seen and understood all that at a glance when he was introduced to her a few hours ago. He had had too much experience of the universal class not to recognise any new type. They might dress and talk as they pleased. They were all the same really. But the fact that she was one of them did not stir his pulses ever so slightly. It did not even interest him.

Nevertheless, when, leaning a little more forward, she let her knee come against his and remain there with a scarcely perceptible pressure, he was inwardly agitated. She had reminded him of another woman, of Ena Talbot. Ena used to do that, touching one with her knee. Only a touch and instantly gone again. Always the knee. Never the foot.

"What's the programme when we go away from here? Good-night and pleasant dreams? Or anything else?"

The voice came to him in a vague whisper. This woman had uttered the words, not Ena. Never would Ena have offered herself grossly and dully. You had to fight for Ena, and take her in spite of herself. Silent, with the blood beginning to throb tumultuously in his veins, he struggled against the old thoughts—the old bad dangerous thoughts.

The exciting quality of Ena! Something possessed by her only of all women who ever lived. During the first period of an uncertain union, before vice and shame bound them irrevocably, and together they began to sink into brutish indulgence, how she could set him alight, body and brain! She herself was as potent as strong drink. In the middle of a dinner with other people she could sting him to sudden and nearly overwhelming desire with a word, a swift turn of her head, a secret sign. She made one *want* her. There was no word but that to express it. The craving she stimulated was the essence, the apotheosis of

all known and imaginable cravings. It obliterated self-control, self-respect, codes of honour, traditions, the habit of good manners and ordinary politeness. If unsatisfied, one would die—or kill her. Life or death. Kisses or blows. That was how she made one feel, so that in the merciless torment of enforced waiting, while she laughed and chaffed with the other men, one's hands hungrily quivered and, unable to caress, yearned to injure. Yes, one could have taken her white throat in both hands and strangled her for keeping one waiting.

"Chatterbox," said his actual companion teasingly. "A penny for your thoughts now!"

Struggling to vanquish them, these thoughts of his, he looked about him, and saw as in a dream the circular hall, the upper gallery with heads and shoulders that showed above the gilded balustrade, the crowded dance floor, the kaleidoscopic colour of the women's dresses, the bright lights rendered dim here and there by the cloudiness of rising tobacco smoke. The music, the chatter, sharp little cries, tinkle of knives and forks, and glass and china—all the noise of the place came to him as an echo, as live sounds that have changed to inanimate memories, sounds heard by a dead man in his tomb. There was nothing here that did not bore him, tire him, weary him to death.

Yet he used to come in joyous haste to places just like this with Ena, when he had her to himself, they two alone, she avowedly belonging to him—for the night at least. If other men looked at her then, he could make them drop their eyes with his insolent stare, and frighten them with the ferocity that lay behind it. She was such good company by herself. Witty, droll, saying outrageous things, fearing neither words nor thoughts, mocking the universe with delicious mirthful banter. Then and now! Oh, God in Heaven, the difference. Only to be with her like that, watching her, listening to her, made one drunk with pleasure.

But there was real drink too, as well as the intoxicant of Ena, more and more of it, right from the very beginning. That other glorious stimulation worked side by side with the siren's charm. As hours passed, a glamour filled the world. Instead of these crude garish tints one had colours of unearthly brightness and transcendental delicacy. The music grew laceratingly sweet, creeping into one's blood a little further each time one raised one's glass, singing songs of rapture deep inside one, making one a miraculously intricate yet unfailingly harmonious piece of music oneself. Joy poured into one through eyes, ears, and the surface of one's skin. The whole surrounding pageant swam glittering in a divinely golden mist.

Dangerous, terribly dangerous thoughts, these, serving while they lasted to increase the still occasional longing for the old delight—the only delight now attainable, since Ena was dead. He got up, and going round the hall, joined his wife in the first pause of the dance.

"Mag, if you have had enough of it, shall we slope?"

They went home, and he was silent in the taxi-cab till she spoke to him.

"Had a happy evening?"

"Rather," he said. "Ripping. Great fun!"

A few nights after this, when they were leaving another restaurant, at which they had entertained a smaller party, she heard him disputing with the manager or head waiter. She and Dorothy were going up the stairs from the cloakroom. Andrew behind them at the foot of the stairs spoke loudly. He told the man to go to the devil.

"Yes," said the man quietly, "that is very well, but I am not to open accounts without references. It is cash here for all the gentlemen."

Next morning she asked Andrew what the fuss had been about.

"Oh, only their nonsense because I wouldn't fork out the ready."

"But wouldn't it have been better to do that, and not run an account with them? We may never go there again."

He laughed, then frowned, and began to stroll idly round the sitting-room, picking up small objects here and there, looking at them reflectively, and putting them down again.

"Mag, old girl," he said after a little while. "I have blown my last bob. I'm cleaned out. It's all gone up the chimney."

Margaret at first could not believe. But the thing was true. He had reached the end of his resources. He told her lightly and carelessly that he had tried hard to pull everything right by systematically backing horses with all that remained of his funds. Three weeks ago he had been fifteen hundred up, but since then he had gone down thousand after thousand till there was literally nothing left.

But this, too—the tale of his betting—seemed unbelievable to her at first.

"How is it possible? You haven't been to races—except with me."

"It isn't necessary to go to races to back horses. In fact, I never make a bet on a racecourse."

Ignorant of such matters, she could not understand the process, but she was soon compelled to accept its disastrous results. Andrew meant what he said. She reproached him, not bitterly, but with consternation and sadness.

"Why not tell me what you were doing? At least you might have done that."

He gave the stupid confused laugh of a schoolboy in presence of his headmaster.

"I didn't dare, old girl. . . . And one must have *some* excitement in life. Otherwise one wouldn't know one was

alive at all. Besides, I haven't plunged headlong, as you might think. I was on good things all the time. I was only defeated by an infernal run of bad luck."

Margaret sat by a window and looked down into the street, bright and gay on one side, with the morning sunshine flickering, all dark in the shadow of the hotel on the other side. She felt dazed, quite unable to think properly. Nevertheless she realised the big main fact. She understood now clearly enough that his childish disregard of consequences would continue for a long time. Unless she could lift him to a higher method of thought, it would always be there. Adversity would not cure him. Danger had no power to scare him.

She turned from the window and spoke to him again, quite gently, in a tone of wonder rather than of upbraiding.

"Don't you *ever* look ahead?"

"How d'you mean?"

"Do you never think of the future and all its possibilities?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Then, what is to become of us?"

"Well, does it matter so very much? Can't we rub along all right? *You're* still going strong, aren't you? Still rolling in it?"

"Indeed I'm not. I was never rolling—and already I have reduced what I had."

"Really?" He made the interrogation as if unselfishly sorry for her, and now no longer himself to blame. "Poor old lady. Never Mrs. Crœsus! You may well ask what next. A pretty thin look-out, eh?"

He paced the room, looking at her affectionately, and once or twice shrugging his shoulders.

"I see you're upset," he said presently; and his tone was again light and cheerful. "But I feel sure we shall manage somehow. It's a long lane that hasn't got a silver

lining," and he laughed. "Look here. So far as I'm concerned, I own up. I confess my sins. I'm a fool about money. Yardley would tell you so."

"He *has* told me so. But I wasn't prepared for such a revelation as this."

She had spoken now with some bitterness, at any rate irritably, and neither spoke again for perhaps a minute. It was she who resumed the discussion.

"Andrew, dear. I'm sorry. I have said things I oughtn't to have said."

"Oh, not a bit."

"Yes," and she was magnanimous and gentle. "I haven't been quite fair to you. This thing is more my fault than yours. I could have prevented it—I *ought* to have prevented it. I might have seen it coming. Perhaps I did really. I let us drift blindly, because—well, I thought I had reasons."

"Margaret, you're a good sort," and, as though now completely at ease, he gave her two or three friendly pats on the back.

"Of course you were naughty to leave me in the dark about the betting. But—never mind." Turning in her chair she had taken his hand, and she played with it as one would with the hand of a child, a little child that one cannot punish, and must therefore forgive. Then she raised it to her lips and kissed it. "Now we have both been foolish. Henceforth we must be sensible." And she was brisk, firm, business-like. "We'll begin now as we mean to go on. No half methods—but cut our coat according to our cloth. . . . We must move out of here at once."

He laughed. "Not a bad idea. But I'm afraid we shall have to clean the slate first."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, pay the bill—and it'll be a long one."

"What, haven't you been paying them?"

"Not since the first few weeks."

"Oh, but that's really wrong. Andrew, it's too bad of you," and she allowed indignation to verge on anger.

"I shouldn't worry. They know me. Perhaps they won't mind waiting." And now he showed plainly that he was getting bored by the interminably long conversation. He shrugged his shoulders wearily. Then seeing her distress, he roused himself, made an effort, and spoke brightly. "Don't be riled, you dear old thing. You have had your fun. I mean, *we* have. It has been a real good time."

THEY had entered a new phase. No more Le Touquet and Mayfair hotels. After a cheap holiday in Brittany, Margaret had taken some comfortable rooms on the north side of the Park at a superior sort of boarding-house.

It was understood that in regard to all questions of finance Andrew had definitely turned over a new leaf. He was to earn a living. He could not be solely dependent on his wife. He said so himself.

Together they studied those advertisements on the front page of *The Times* that suggest every kind of propitious employment to the idle and venturesome. "Exceptional opportunity for gentleman willing to invest capital in highly successful progressive business"—"Active educated gentleman with small capital wanted"—and so on. But, as Andrew pointed out to her, there was probably a catch in all of them. Moreover, he was not a gentleman with capital, whether big or small.

He went often to his club, where he met several members who, like himself, were looking out for something to do. At the club the talk ran on making money. Men, too, that he described as being engaged in very large enterprises, men full of influence, able to pull strings, held forth sagely and luminously sometimes to an eagerly attentive audience. Andrew reported the gist of these impressive harangues, and told her of openings that had been hinted at. Kenya Colony was still a rich field. One need not think that speculation in rubber was a played-out game. Copper and tin were full of life. Tobacco shares, in spite of high quotations, continued to offer possibilities. The immense profits made by the big companies were leading the way for all the lesser ones.

One morning he asked her abruptly to lend him five hundred pounds.

"Oh, Andrew. What for?"

"A flutter. . . . No, a safe thing."

"Not horses again?"

"Oh, no. I have promised you I wouldn't touch racing. This is a Stock Exchange tip, and honestly I think it's a cert."

She let him have the money, and within a week he paid her back. This first time luck had been kind. He had made two hundred and fifty pounds.

Joyous after this success, with cash at his disposal, he took her about once more, gave her treats. Nowadays, however, their feasts were at humble restaurants in Soho, and they wore morning dress. If they went to the theatre they sat at the back of the dress circle. Coming and going, they used omnibuses and the Tube railway instead of motor cars and taxis. But they were not without society, for he had found old friends, men with whom he served in the war, and he introduced them to Margaret and invited them both to sit at his table and to pay visits at the boarding-house.

One of them was Bill Kenward, a huge, weighty, dark-haired man, with a fat chuckling laugh, often spoken of as "the Major." Another was Richard Lorimer, once a regular soldier, but invalided out of the army after the war. Another was George Ryan, much younger than the others, indeed only just old enough to have seen the last year of hostilities. These three men soon became close companions of the Lanes.

Margaret understood that they were second-class people, intellectually and socially, the product of inferior public schools, vulgar homes, doubtful companionships, but with the active overflowing good-nature that is perhaps peculiar to their class, rather expecting to be snubbed and ebulliently grateful when treated with kindliness,

and passing at once from deference to familiarity. But she did not mind. They were honest. Instinct told her this, and she was right. But, of course, as she knew, stupidity can be as dangerous as malevolence.

One or another of them, and often all three, were their guests in the Lancaster Gate sitting-room every day. Andrew brought them in before dinner. Then, when they had all been out and dined together, they returned to finish the evening.

Margaret made them coffee with a special apparatus, graciously waited on them, and encouraged them to talk with Andrew of the war. It was at this period a subject ordinarily held to be taboo. No one wanted to hear any more about it, or even to have it alluded to. But the war they evoked in memory was very different from the picture of mud and blood and tears that we have since accepted with so odd a pleasure. Andrew and his friends told of rest billets, glorious health, jokes, fun, games, sing-songs, and, with almost nostalgic regret, reminded one another of happy, happy times that would never come again.

Messrs. Kenward, Lorimer, and Ryan liked her greatly, made much of her in every possible way. As a useful stereotyped joke they described themselves as her Three Musketeers. Andrew was D'Artagnan or Little Billee; but, as she laughingly assured them, she was neither My Lady nor Trilby. She called them by their Christian names, and they spoke to her and of her as "Mrs. A."

"Mrs. A., what are you doing to-morrow? Would you care to get up early, drive a hundred miles, and watch some four-legged animals try to jump and gallop over three and a half miles of a fair hunting country?"

They would not leave Mrs. A. out of things. They made her go with them to point-to-point races. They desired her company whatever they were doing. Other men in their train followed this lead, and accepted Mrs. A. on trust as a

real good sort. Sometimes she had five or six sturdy males assembled in the sitting-room.

This masculine atmosphere was pleasant to her. It was an entirely new experience. She who had never been able to get on with the other sex, enjoyed a success that had come so easily. Moreover there was satisfaction in knowing that women had altogether gone out of her life, and that they were therefore not likely to come into Andrew's life. She had not wanted to keep him for ever tied to her as closely as in the beginning, but it was nice to be able to give him freedom without danger.

Of an evening, when the Lanes had a party, there were tremendous conversations, on politics, sport, worldly philosophy, or pure ethics, each one airing his views, and often two or three endeavouring to do it simultaneously.

"Open the window," she ordered. "I can't see for the smoke. You're not human beings, you're chimneys."

She was making more coffee and she talked over her shoulder, interjecting a remark now and then.

In the midst of the babel they would all stop to give her a hearing.

"Shut up, Bill. Mrs. A. said something."

And they appealed to her to give decisions.

"Mrs. A., am I right or wrong?"

"I think," she said, "that you are not right or wrong, you are simply silly. The mistake you all make is not putting yourself in the other fellow's place. You don't even listen. Instead of arguing, you bellow."

"Bravo—bravo," and there was vociferous applause.

"Stop," and she held up her hand.

There was a slight tapping on the door, and it softly opened, but no one became visible. Margaret went out and saw the landlady, in a dressing-room, discreetly beckoning. The landlady asked with plaintive apologeticness if they could make a shade less noise. The hour was late. Some guests on the upper floor suffered from insomnia.

The only one of them with whom she entered into anything like a real friendship was George Ryan. George was Irish, fond of fun as the others, but himself much more amusing. He had brown eyes, a small dark moustache as if painted, on his upper lip, and naturally curly hair. His manner was absurdly youthful. Often he seemed like a boy merely pretending to be a man. He made Margaret feel motherly. Yet he somehow inspired confidence. She felt that she could trust him.

She told him that Andrew must not drink at all, and that it would be a mistaken kindness to make him break his rule.

George promised his aid. And also said that he would see what could be done about getting a job for Andrew. But when she spoke of a further anxiety—the dread that Andrew might take to speculation—he said with a deprecating laugh, that there he could not be of any use. "Fact is, Mrs. A., I am a bit of a gambler myself."

"Then it's very wrong of you. I don't approve of that at all."

He said he would lay her words to heart, because if he incurred her disapproval he did not know what he should do. When he had said this he grinned. He often paid her compliments, and told her that he admired her greatly. Once or twice, in a half facetious manner, he tried to make love to her.

After a time George became affiliated with a firm of stock-brokers. And soon he obtained something of the same kind for Andrew. Mr. Lane now had an office to which he might go whenever he pleased; but obviously there was no work for him when he got there. Still it

sounded good. "My husband," she was able to say, "is obliged to go into the City on most days."

She tried to keep up with the Stock Exchange talk. At one of their Soho dinners, when the Major and Lorimer, as well as George, were present, they had a long debate in which she took a full share. Flushed and eager, with her elbows on the table, and her chin in her hands, she turned her eyes from one to another, asking questions, and volunteering advice. In this crowded place they talked with subdued voices, like high conspirators, or children plotting mischief. Andrew—handsome, pale, careless, leaning back against sham tapestry, with his dark smooth head reflected and multiplied in the mirrors—smiled at her eagerness.

"Mrs. A., we're boring you," said the Major.

"No," she said. "Tell me. I want to know."

Soon she suggested ideas. Why must one go outside absolutely safe investments? They fluctuate up and down. Surely one could deal in them as well as all these lower-class things. And she reminded them of how, traditionally, the Rothschilds had founded their fortune. Battle of Waterloo. Consols. First news of victory.

But they said that such a coup would not be possible nowadays, even for Rothschilds.

"Everything is discounted beforehand."

"Inside knowledge. That's what one wants."

And Andrew echoed this. "Inside knowledge. It's the same in all affairs. That's why politicians—members of the Government—could make money if they cared to."

"They do, old boy," said Bill Kenward, with his chuckling laugh.

Soon after this, Andrew said he had obtained some absolutely inside knowledge about the oil market. He

asked Margaret to lend him a thousand pounds for ten days. She demurred. But he said they were all coming in, so sure were they.

"Talk to George about it. He'll say you ought to come in with us yourself."

She gave him the money.

Then, after a fortnight had passed, he asked her for a second thousand, to avoid the loss of the first. And once more, a third time, she yielded to his importunity, and gave him still another thousand.

Before Christmas he confessed that he had made a dead loss of the whole amount.

She was unable to understand how this could be. Some. But not all? If the shares were good, even if they went down, he could sell them.

"Oh, I never really held them. It was cover, you know."

He and George together explained about margins, differences, and the rest of it.

"Oh, but that's dreadful," she said. "It's sheer gambling. Just as bad as racehorses."

On a steel-bright afternoon in the windy month of March they had come out to Hampstead for the purpose of visiting a furniture shop.

They looked at it through its windows first, and then entered it. Margaret was immediately impressed. This main part of the shop had space and dignity, and offered nothing of the cluttered lumber-room aspect that is common to such places. One's eye was caught by some unquestionably good pieces—such as some Louis Quinze settees, a row of wheatsheaf chairs, a William and Mary bureau, and two very large carved book-cases with latticed glass guarding their columned divisions. A large green vase full of daffodils stood conspicuously and prettily on a big gold-legged table in the central position; and seated at this table there was a pale, dark girl writing letters and making notes.

She rose languidly and addressed the visitors with a faint smile and a slightly over-refined manner.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lane, I think—by appointment? Mrs. Harland is upstairs, but she's expecting you. Yes, Mrs. Harland mentioned it before luncheon."

Then she beckoned to another girl, half visible in a doorway, and sent her up a flight of hitherto undetected stairs to fetch the proprietor.

"Won't you sit down? Or would you prefer to look round?"

Mrs. Lane evidently thought that the sooner she began to inspect things the better. She moved towards a side room, accompanied by the dark girl, and followed by Andrew.

"Mrs. Harland will be down in a minnit."

The other girl, returning, delivered this message. Then she unexpectedly gave a nervous little laugh. Quite young, red-haired, ingenuous, she hung about in doorways, while the party moved on, and stared hard at Andrew. When he looked her way she blushed warmly.

In the part at the side, and also in the part at the back, both stock and arrangement were more ordinary. The spoil of many houses surrounded one. Tallboys, chests of drawers, writing-desks, wooden work-boxes, tea-caddies, wine coolers, foot rests, embroidered chair-backs—all these suggested death, ruin, the breaking-up of homes, the passing away of family life. Yet one need not grow sentimental on that account. The dealer in second-hand furniture is the friend of executors as well as of auctioneers.

Margaret, rapidly examining the stock with an excitement that she endeavoured to conceal, saw that the assembled objects ran from solid values right down the scale to odds and ends that must be almost worthless. Several tables were spread with Waterford glass. A large quantity of china occupied every ledge or open shelf, and she noticed that all shepherdesses were labelled Chelsea, while Dresden claimed boys, horses, camels, and any plate or vase with a patch of turquoise blue and a line of gilding was Sèvres. Genuine or otherwise? Probably the cracked and chipped bits were all right. But who would ever want those copper warming-pans, or that board on which had been fixed a dozen or more small metal door-knockers? Just rubbish. She stooped over a glass-topped show-case and peered at war medals, Masonic jewels, watches without their cases, umbrella handles without their sticks, cloisonné boxes without their lids.

"Here's Mrs. Harland," said the dark girl.

The lady owner glided to them. About sixty years of age, painted, dyed, she was so amazingly thin that she seemed to come through the furniture itself instead of through the incredibly small openings that were yet sufficient to give

passage to her skeleton frame and its highly-decorative costume.

"How-de-do?" said Mrs. Harland.

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Lane.

And both politely smiling, they looked at each other with the sharp anxiety of two people about to enter into an important business transaction. Hope, fear, immense suspicion, mingle to make the strain of such moments. Natural foes, yet quite possibly mutual saviours, each feels that the other holds destiny in her hands, while throughout the stress of emotion they remember the vital necessity of being calm, cold, firm, with a deadly astuteness, an unshakable common-sense. Poker-players, they must control their heart-beats as rigidly as their faces.

"Now what have you seen? . . . Come along. . . . I call all this my jumble sale," said Mrs. Harland, waving a bony jewelled hand towards the lesser bric-à-brac. "But it would surprise you how people fasten upon the cheap stuff. Sprats to catch salmon! People come in and out all day long. They make some trumpery little purchase, and then they come again and give you a thumping big order. You never can tell. . . . Adèle, please go and attend to those people. Just as I was saying—those are people who have been here before."

Thus conducted, with a flow of engaging talk, Mr. and Mrs. Lane completed their tour of inspection.

In still another room they saw a large quantity of good old-fashioned furniture, honest well-made things of no particular period, but made to last for ever. Behind the shop there was a strip of garden between high walls, and at the bottom of it a large shed used for repairs. A dry wrinkled old man was working there. Mrs. Harland led them out through a door in the wall to show them a tumble-down stable that had been converted into a garage. It was occupied by a largish van and a small run-about car. Mrs. Harland vaunted the merits of both these

machines, and then she led the visitors to the privacy of her own apartments.

These were over the shop, and here they found a shyly aggressive young man reading. With very long hair and a white muffler round his neck because of some slight eruptive trouble, he proved to be Mrs. Harland's son. He shook hands limply on his mother's introduction, and glared in timid rage as she amplified it.

"Geoffrey—Mr. and Mrs. Lane, who are thinking of taking over, if we can anyhow come to terms. . . . My one and only, Mrs. Lane. Geoffrey is just down from Oxford. He has a soul above trade and wants to be a poet. No, I should not have said that. You *are* a poet, aren't you, Geoff? What I mean is, he wishes to make poetry his vocation in life."

They went downstairs again, and Mrs. Harland left them in charge of Adèle, the dark-haired girl, while she herself attended to some more customers.

Then, when free, she begged them to examine closely "these really splendid specimens," and the ringed fingers waved towards the two huge carved book-cases.

"They are pedigree things—known to everybody. Out of the Brightlingsea sale. I want five hundred guineas for them—and I wouldn't advise you to take a penny less. They're *elephants*, of course. That's the trade slang," and she laughed cracklingly. "One has to wait for the right purchaser. Again, that settee! We had an art critic here the other day and he simply raved. 'Priceless and unique,' he said, didn't he, Adèle? Adèle will bear me out."

With her languid manner and affected drawl Adèle bore her out in everything. She was several times appealed to for corroboration.

All at once Mrs. Harland asked a point-blank question.

"Now you have seen for yourself, do you intend going on?"

"Oh, yes, I think so," said Margaret, looking at Andrew.

"You are still interested?"

"Quite."

"Very well," said Mrs. Harland briskly, and as if throwing away her high-coloured mask and abandoning all poker-like tricks. "Let's sit down and come to brass tacks. Business now? Eh?"

They sat at the table with the vase of daffodils, Adèle standing by in a studiously graceful attitude, and the red-haired girl hovering shy and awkward at a little distance.

"I am offering you the chance of a lifetime," said Mrs. Harland. "Go into everything with Messrs. Jowett, use your own judgment too, examine as deeply as you like, and you really can't get away from it. A great—a very great opportunity." Then she told them that the shop had been established fifty years ago—"before any of us were born"—and since then it had invariably paid its way. In that time it had passed through many hands, but not a single hand had dropped money over it. It was a going concern. She repeated that expression more than once. Five long years she had held it, working it up year after year. "Without vanity I may say that personal influence has drawn together the superior kind of clientèle we now have. You would take over prestige and traditions—as well as a real going concern. Another thing. We stand well with the trade. That is half the battle. Lastly, the situation—miraculously favourable, a fine residential district, and *also* a holiday resort—streams of people passing your windows—the Tube railway within a stone's throw. With energy, and starting where I leave off, there is no reason why you shouldn't make a gold mine of it."

"Thank you," said Margaret guardedly, and yet burning with excitement. "Messrs. Jowett, I take it, will be prepared to supply actual figures"; and she rose from her chair.

"Mr. Jowett will be open as daylight"; and Mrs. Harland rose too. "I have instructed him to be so. But

one moment, please. After all I have said, you may ask—and very naturally—Why do I want to part with it? If it is such a good thing, why don't I stick to it? . . . Mrs. Lane, you have seen the reason—upstairs, just now. My boy, Geoffrey! For him I renounce. A poet he will be, and already he demands all a poet's license. He gives me no peace, because the atmosphere here is uncongenial to his muse. Adèle will bear me out."

"Yes," said Adèle, in drawling confirmation, "Geoffrey detests Hampstead."

"He wants to live in Florence," Mrs. Harland continued. "So to Florence we must go. Fortunately I am not dependent. . . . Goodbye. You'll write or telephone—won't you?—as soon as you have made up your minds . . . Goodbye."

They walked up the hill towards the Heath, discussing all the pros and cons of the enterprise; but in fact, Margaret had made up her mind to take this bold plunge into business life. The shop surpassed her most sanguine hopes. It charmed, and excited, yet satisfied her. She was ready to believe that a beneficent Providence, understanding both her requirements and her limitations, had made its existence known to her.

She had wanted to become a working woman, but she thought with fear of any occupation that would prevent her from keeping an eye on Andrew. Then had come the idea of their working together. How splendid that would be. Why not? A shop? But what kind of shop—flowers, bonnets, art fabrics? When she saw Mrs. Harland's advertisement she felt a thrill. Furniture! She had never thought of it, and yet it was the one thing about which she knew anything. She was *good* at furniture.

"I can't help thinking there may be a catch in it," said Andrew, as they drank tea at a confectioner's.

"Oh, what makes you think that?"

"Well, I didn't cotton to that old bag of bones. She's a liar, of course. She said she wasn't born fifty years ago."

Margaret laughed. "A pardonable fib! She was frank enough about what she called the jumble sale."

And Margaret spoke of advantages that Mrs. Harland herself had not mentioned. The residents of the older part of Hampstead were all rich people, cultivated people, people of taste and discrimination. In these lovely old Georgian houses nothing tawdry or vulgar could find a place, but their owners would be continuously looking out for beautiful things with which to furnish them. They would buy, they could not resist buying, the sort of choice pieces that the Lanes would be able to offer.

"Clever old girl," said Andrew good-humouredly. "All the same, I should consult Yardley, if I were you, before putting up the dibs."

But she took no advice from Mr. Yardley or anybody else. She was too eager. Not even employing a solicitor, she accepted everything, valuations, schedules, inventories. She rushed on and signed the contract that had been prepared by the other side almost without looking at it.

Within a month they were established at Hampstead, with their names over the door, proud possessors of the whole concern.

Life now was bustling, gay and bright, full of wholesome excitement. Early to bed and early to rise. They were on the move all day. The thrill of receiving actual customers was wonderful. People came in, exactly as Mrs. Harland had said, merely to look round. One of the girls stepped forward while Margaret remained seated, pretending to be deeply engrossed with important papers. After a little delay she joined in doing the honours of the place. Admiring but not buying, the customer would infallibly drift

backward towards the cheaper stuff. And again Mrs. Harland was "borne out." The jumble sale exercised a strange fascination.

"Oh, *do* let me see those door-knockers. Are they real? How very quaint. But *rather* sweet. How much? I really think I must have one."

Sixpence, or perhaps a shilling, was garnered, and these customers went away. But they had not so far reappeared. Mrs. Harland said they always came back.

At the end of a fortnight Margaret was perturbed by the amount of money going out, and the very little money coming in. Current expenses seemed to be enormous. She decided that somehow or other they must be cut down. Of course, she had not yet got the hang of things. She said this often. "It will take a little time to get the hang of things."

Towards this end people in the same way of business as herself proved extremely useful. Mrs. Harland had not deceived when she boasted of being on good terms with the trade. The trade, as represented by elderly, grubby men, and now and then an elderly female, assured the new proprietor that she could rely on them implicitly. When she went to auctions she would have nothing to fear from the "knock-out" or any other nasty devices. If she just said what she wanted, nobody would bid against her, and when they themselves wanted anything, she must oblige them "same as Mrs. Harland had done." All of Margaret's earlier sales were made to these people. They gave her a ten per cent. profit on cost price, and expected this to cover transport and anything else. They took the articles away at their own charge.

The most friendly of these dealers, often obliged with odd pieces for clients, was Mr. Brace. He was a big, stout man, who made a clatter as of a horse breaking into the shop—a runaway horse, too, because he was asthmatic, and stood puffing and blowing, after making his noisy

entrance. He said he was an ally of the shop of old standing. When looking at you he put his spectacles up to his forehead or low down on his nose. It was the first time Margaret had ever seen this trick. He used pompous phrases, such as "up against a fallacy," "s'lutions of economic problems," "the 'ole paramount question."

Margaret disliked him at first; but eventually he became a real friend, taking Andrew and her away with him to attend auction sales in the country, putting them wise, and aiding them in every possible way. Her dislike was due to a belief that he secretly looked down on their efforts. He spoke of himself too humbly, and of her and Andrew with an excessive deference that seemed to have something mocking in it.

"I'm on'y in a small way. A pigmy in the industrial organisation of the realm. But you two are big pots." And he described them as "amachoors."

"Excuse me—we are *not* amateurs," she said sharply.

"Well, this shop is an 'obby."

"Indeed it isn't."

"Is that a fact?" said Mr. Brace, raising his spectacles and looking hard at her.

"Very much so," said Margaret. "Our bread and butter depends on it."

After this his manner changed.

Talking to Margaret he was tenderly respectful, admiring, overflowing with courtesy, while to Andrew he showed a jovial brotherliness, addressing him sometimes as "Ole man," or "Comrade," or "Citizen Lane."

Mr. Brace was not the only person with whom she seemed to arouse something like admiration. She was conscious of this in treating with the more youthful members of the trade, and also during visits from masculine customers. Aware of it, she tried to make use of it. Everything helps.

What they saw in her the looking-glass showed her plainly—a firm, well set-up young woman of about twenty-eight or twenty-nine, the face strong, with a firm round chin, strong but not in the least hard, and lips ready of their own accord to open into a frank and friendly smile; no longer smart and distinguished, dressed in neat black, with a white collar and not a single ornament, but incredibly better-looking than anyone a few years ago could have foretold as now possible. Smiling at herself in the glass, she thought of George Ryan. Silly boy. How he used to go on. It had not been easy to stop him, and put an end to all his nonsense.

Perhaps such idle thoughts were really caused by her observation of Andrew. His appearance in the shop always seemed to produce an effect on customers of the opposite sex. When he passed through it, wearing one of his blue suits, they stared at him in silence. They seemed stimulated by the apparition, and regretted that it vanished so quickly. At other times, when he was conspicuous, lending a hand and doing things that had been done by a workman called "Jim," till the services of Jim were dispensed with, they were chatty and amiable with him. Without his coat, wearing Jim's white apron, he shifted the heavy pieces of furniture, pushed them forward, replaced them in obedience to Margaret's order. He enjoyed doing all this, and would not allow anybody to guess that he was connected with the proprietor otherwise than as her servant. He obliterated himself in a moment when no longer wanted.

"Where is that obliging man?" said a lady customer one day. "I should have liked to give him a shilling."

"Oh, he doesn't want it," said Margaret.

"No. I should *like* to. Will you give it him for me?"

"Oh, well, you are very kind. If you insist."

"Yes, I do insist. Thank you. Good morning."

Margaret laughingly gave the tip to Andrew in the

presence of Old Gunn the cabinet-maker and the two girls.

Andrew was very gay and jolly. "Who says I'm a ne'er-do-well, or a faint heart?" He tossed the coin into the air. "Earned with the sweat of my brow."

Adèle Simpson, the languid girl, applauded him by faint titters. Joyce Barrow, the red-haired girl, was enraptured, bursting with mirth. She kept on saying: "Oh, Mr. Lane! Oh, Mr. Lane!"

"Spit on it, sir," said the old artificer. And Andrew pretended to do this.

He got on so well with the humble aids. Too well. The noise of laughter coming from the little shed at the bottom of the garden made itself obtrusively heard while Margaret was attending to a superior kind of customer.

She went out there as soon as she could. Joyce Barrow, old Gunn, and a man who had come to mend the small car were all laughing, while Andrew, seated on the carpenter's bench, held forth to them. She heard a scrap of it as she came to the open doorway. "My philosophy is simple. Take care of to-day and let to-morrow take care of itself. Never look before you leap, but leap your biggest. . . ."

"That's right, sir," Old Gunn nodded his head, laughing. The greasy, oil-stained workman guffawed; Miss Red-hair, wiping her eyes, said: "Oh, he *is* a caution."

"May I ask what you are doing here?" said Margaret.

"Only listening to Mr. Lane," said the girl.

"Then kindly go back to your duties. Mr. Lane has nothing further to say."

She wished that he was not quite so free and easy, so "pally," his own word, with Mr. Brace and with all the common people. She would have been glad also if he could have snubbed that girl, and kept her in her place. It was becoming too like the bad old days. And she thought—Was the taste for low company something innate, and not an acquired habit? But she dismissed this thought as very

disloyal. She ought not to have had it even for a moment. He was really being splendid in this new experience.

Weeks slipped by. Margaret had begun to sleep badly at night. She lay awake thinking. In the daytime she was too busy to think.

She had made one or two ugly discoveries. In regard to the valuation of stock, she had been "done down" by the other side. On looking into the badly-kept books with Adèle, she found that the cost of things as shown by invoices and entries was far less than the figure at which they appeared in the schedule. The price marked in plain figures on tickets in the shop did not tally with the price that she had paid for the things when taking over. It had not been a real valuation—merely an estimate of values. Moreover, she feared the extent of the liabilities she had undertaken. People came and asked for Mrs. Harland's address. One or two of them spoke of money owing by Mrs. Harland. Then when Margaret told them this had nothing to do with her, one of them said he had been informed that he must now look to her, for she was responsible for everything. These were matters of importance. But small matters that perhaps she should have disregarded also worried her.

That woman who had tipped Andrew came back and made one or two substantial purchases. But somehow or other she knew now that he was a gentleman, and not a servant. Perhaps one of the girls had told her. She asked if he would be kind enough to come to her house and help her install the things she had bought.

Seeing him outside the shop one afternoon she stopped, talking to him twenty minutes or more. On another day she had the consummate impudence to ask him to tea at

her house. She gave this outrageous invitation in Margaret's presence.

Margaret answered for her husband, declining the invitation none too politely.

She felt sorry afterwards that she had been rude. She remembered the trade axiom: "The customer can do no wrong." She was glad that Andrew had noticed nothing amiss. She must keep her impatience under control.

But those two girls tried her temper. They were "amateurs," if you like. In the morning they put on large blue aprons kept for them in a cupboard, and went round with dusters and bottles, polishing the furniture. Then for the rest of the day they were shopwalkers, hand-shakers, whatever you pleased to call them. But of very little use to anybody! Adèle could not even come there in time. She was often preposterously late. She yawned while apologising, and made no promises that the fault should not be repeated. A boy from Sandhurst had come up unexpectedly and taken her out. "Not bad fun," she said drawlingly, "but too tiring. Boys never know that enough is as good as a feast." She was so languid sometimes that Margaret could not bear to watch her slow movements and weary postures. At last she spoke to her with an extreme tartness.

"What on earth is the matter with you?"

"I'm not sure that I haven't hurt my back lifting things."

"Nobody asked you to lift them," said Margaret curtly.

"No," drawled Adèle. "But p'raps I thought I was stronger than I really am."

"All right then, chuck it."

"Would you mind?"

"Not in the least."

That was the end of Adèle. She was paid her salary and she went.

Before very long the other girl followed her.

Margaret had seen for a goodish while that Joyce Barrow was idiotically in love with her husband. When he spoke to her unexpectedly she blushed and gasped and stammered. When he was taking no notice of her, she looked at him with the unabashed hunger of a fierce young cannibal. She followed him about, and made silly excuses for going to look for him if he wasn't there.

One afternoon she ostentatiously carried his overcoat upstairs to dry it at the kitchen fire. He had been out in the rain.

"Pray don't trouble," said Margaret.

"Trouble!" said Joyce ecstatically. "There's nothing I wouldn't do for Mr. Lane."

"Thank you, nothing is needed—nothing whatever."

Margaret decided to sack her. This red-haired minx would not stick at trifles. She was the sort of person who might secretly procure brandy for him if he ever asked her. Margaret tried to persuade herself that in this direction the girl might become a danger that ought to be removed at once. But it was not her real reason for the dismissal.

She told Andrew, without any explanation, that she was getting rid of Miss Barrow, and engaging an older and better-trained young woman. To her great satisfaction he did not mind in the slightest degree. He was out on the Saturday that Joyce departed from the shop for the last time. Evidently he had not cared twopence for her.

Nevertheless, queer, troubled thoughts came to Margaret now, even in the busy daytime. It had been a large part of her plan that as shopkeepers she and Andrew would be always within sight of each other. But this object could not be attained. He was necessarily away from her a great deal. He drove their van. As well as fetching the things they bought at sales, he delivered any goods purchased by customers. She thought of women; of the women with whom he might be making acquaintance unknown to her—silly infatuated girls like Joyce—impudent,

determined, mature women like that forfeited customer who had asked him to visit her.

Thinking in this manner she felt the tentative approaches of a very distinct pain. He was so sweet to her, so very good, always light-hearted and cheerful, trusting her, working for her, comforting her in moments of disappointment. But was not a marked change developing in the very nature of their companionship? Friendliness, kindliness, consideration, were perhaps to take the place of things of higher quality. It seemed that he was more completely a friend, but very much less a lover.

During his absence, if she knew that he had Mr. Brace with him she felt glad. Mr. Brace was the sort of chaperon who would fend off undesirables. Andrew was safe, too, with Mr. Brace in relation to that other danger. Mr. Brace had touched on this question and he understood Margaret's wishes.

"Hubby tells me you keep him religious on the water-bottle," Mr. Brace had said. "Now is that wise? I should have thought a man of his age and physique needed it."

"He doesn't need it," said Margaret. "He has found from experience that his health is better as a teetotaller. It is a régime—and, Mr. Brace, it would be kind of you not to do anything to upset it."

"*Compris*," said Mr. Brace. "A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse."

He was kind, Mr. Brace. He meant them well. He showed sympathy, and tried to conceal his recognition of the fact that their business was not really flourishing. Standing with his hands in his pockets and his spectacles on his forehead, he looked at those good things, the Wheatsheaf chairs, the French settees, the bureaus, that were the proudest adornment of the shop. He said they were truly good.

"But they don't go off, do they? Seems as if you couldn't get a move on. I wonder if we could syndicate 'em."

"How do you mean, Mr. Brace?"

"Well, let some of us come in sharing." And he explained that sometimes half a dozen dealers would subscribe the money necessary to take up a "little line" like that, and then clear the line at a profit. Such things ought to be put into a sale at Christie's with a high reserve. They wouldn't be bought there, but they would have an airing, and would gather prestige by their having been seen and talked about. Then letters could be written to well-known connoisseurs. "I must think about it," said Mr. Brace. "I don't like to see you two with all this dead weight on you. Sunk capital and ov'r'ead expenses. That's the bane, as I call it. And you don't always calculate it. The unknown factor that makes the equation come out upside down! Yes, there's a lot to learn."

But the nearer she came to getting a real hang of things the less she liked them. Money flowed out as with a generous stream of water, and came in like small globules of ice from a frost-bound tap. The clientèle as a source of revenue was beneath contempt. And, worse still, claims against the business as a going concern that had not wound up its affairs on being transferred grew to terrifying proportions. She paltered with them. She hid them from Andrew, and wished that she could hide them from herself.

Lying awake on summer nights, she knew with certainty that the shop was doomed to failure. It could only be a question of time. Dropping asleep at dawn after the long fever of anxious forebodings, she recovered a kind of false tranquillity. Waking in the broad sunlight, she felt perhaps a renewal of hope. They were not done for yet.

She was brave. She said, "The tide will turn." Nevertheless, on a lovely evening in early September, she was in such low spirits that she allowed Andrew to perceive the

extent of her trouble. Then rallying herself she said it again, her cheering catchword—"The tide will turn."

"Let's hope so," he said good-humouredly.

"Oh, yes. I *know* the tide will turn."

"And if it never turns, what the Dickens does it matter? We'll try something else . . . Put on your hat, and I'll get out the car, and we'll go for a run. We'll have a bite of food at St. Albans or Hatfield."

"There's supper here all prepared."

"Give it to the cat."

October brought a never-to-be-forgotten day—a day of hope, of wild excitement that continued for so many hours that the strain of it almost exhausted her. A big deal was pending. It seemed that all those good things were to go off in the most advantageous manner.

Andrew was away, in company with Mr. Brace, attending a sale at an old manor house in Hertfordshire.

About eleven o'clock in the morning an agent came to see her. He was a stranger. A smooth-speaking, polite, and yet very businesslike young man, who said he was acting for a rich client. He looked round, and soon disclosed the name of his employer. "Mr. Van Salter—you have probably heard of him?"

She said no. But all that she heard of him now was entirely pleasant and gratifying—a self-made man, South African, extremely rich, and, having bought a large country house, firmly resolved to furnish it in tip-top style. Not a connoisseur, knowing nothing of such matters, relying on other people to guide him.

The young man immediately selected the Chippendale and Sheraton stuff as eminently suitable. He also chose the Louis Quinze sofas, and the William and Mary bureau. A clash—but no matter! He rejected the two enormous

book-cases as cumbrous and ugly. Then with unerring eye he picked out some smaller pieces; together with bits of china—Chelsea and Dresden ware—which he pronounced to be unquestionably correct. He made a list of everything that appealed to him, and raised no objection to the prices asked. On the whole they appeared to him reasonable. Besides, when you get a person who can afford it, it's just as well to let him pay. And he laughed ingratiatingly. Margaret laughed too. She was throbbing with excitement.

Then the young man made an appointment for half-past one. At half-past one precisely he would bring Mr. Van Salter to inspect the things, and unless he was mistaken Mr. Van Salter would take the lot on his recommendation.

Margaret lunched in good time, and at half-past one was excitedly waiting. They did not come. A couple of grandfather clocks in the back room struck two. She heard them ticking as the minutes passed. It was half-past two, and neither the agent nor the patron had come.

Then another man, a lawyer's clerk, appeared. He had heard that he might possibly catch Mr. Van Salter there. Someone had told him that Mr. Van Salter had an appointment there. But one must suppose that he had either forgotten it, or been delayed. He was a very busy man. The lawyer's clerk remained for a few minutes, and then went off to catch Mr. Van Salter somewhere else. It was all very natural.

Margaret waited—not sitting, but walking about the shop. She could not keep still.

Then at a little after three, they came—the agent apologising as he entered, and ushering his client for an introduction. Mr. Van Salter was not prepossessing, and yet just what one might have expected. Grey, middle-aged, very common, the collar of his fur coat turned up at the back, with a square bowler hat which he did not dream of taking off, he sat down without being asked, and began to

pick his teeth with a tooth-pick while he looked about him dully. The young man gave him the list, and then made him get up and examine the goods.

"All right," said Mr. Van Salter. "I'm a buyer. Done." Laconic, gross, but rich, he sat down again.

Margaret and the young man went through the figures and agreed on the total. Everything was to be removed at once. A van would be sent. The things should reach the country house before nightfall.

"But it must be a cash transaction," said Margaret, suddenly nervous.

The young man said of course it would be cash. Mr. Van Salter would write a cheque there and then.

Margaret's nervousness increased. "Oh, but I don't know," she said hurriedly. "I don't think I could accept a cheque—that is, not let you take the things away until the cheque is cleared. You see my husband's not here. I am entirely by myself. What I mean is—references, or any kind of guarantee . . ."

"What's she saying?" asked Mr. Van Salter. He had brought out his cheque-book and was shaking a fountain pen.

The young man shrugged his shoulders and smiled. Then in a few words he explained the little difficulty. Mrs. Lane appeared to be shy of trusting them.

"What's the time?" asked Mr. Van Salter. They told him it was twenty-past three. And he said she could telephone to his bank and ask if he was good for the amount. "National Provincial Bank, Harding Street Branch. Holborn 5673." Having said this he laid the cheque-book on his knee and went on picking his teeth.

Margaret, apologising for doing what he had suggested, saying she knew it was not necessary, but he must forgive her for following strict business customs, telephoned to the bank, and asked to speak to the manager. The manager, a voice said, had already answered her. It was the man-

ager's voice. Yes, it said, Mr. Van Salter had an account with them.

"Ask him explicit," said Mr. Van Salter laconically. "Am I good for the amount?"

Margaret shyly asked the explicit question, and immediately heard laughter at the other end of the wire. "Yes," said the voice, "good for that and for ten times that. Good for half a million, if you want to know."

"Thank you," said Margaret, hanging up the receiver, and, warm and confused, she concluded the transaction.

They went away. The van came. By twilight all her best furniture and china had been removed. But she had the cheque safe in her desk, endorsed, crossed, ready to send to her bankers by the evening post.

Directly Andrew came home she recited the wonderful story, pointing joyously to the blank spaces in the shop, and telling him how clever and firm she had been.

But Andrew did not praise her. He looked gloomy.

"Andrew, aren't you pleased?"

"Charmed, old thing, if it's really O.K. But it sounds to me like the confidence trick."

"How *could* it be? What nonsense. Listen," and she told of how she had rung up the purchaser's bank. "The manager vouched for him."

"The manager—or an accomplice? I wonder! Let's have a squint at the telephone book."

According to the telephone directory, that grand and solid bank had not a Holborn 5673 among its numbers. Nor had it a Harding Street branch.

"Spoofed!" said Andrew. "What a dashed shame."

This was virtually the end. After it nothing went right, and everything went wrong. The tide had turned, but it was ebbing, not flooding.

She asked Mr. Brace to help her in disposing of the business, and he promised to do what he could. He was altogether sympathetic. She told him she felt her lack of success as a very cruel disappointment, more especially because she had pinned her faith on the high character of the neighbourhood.

"I'm genuine sorry," said Mr. Brace. "But there you were up against a fallacy from the first. You don't want a rich neighb'rood for this sort of thing, you want a poor one. These big houses, what you speak of, full of good furniture! Why should they buy any more? It's *you* to buy from them, when they're sold up. They're a source o' supply, not your market . . . Now if you'd settled at Golder's Green, with all those small people, and houses springing up like so many mushrooms . . . And you didn't need to *buy* a business. You could just have started a business on your own. See the difference?"

Her extrication from the disastrous adventure was slow and difficult. Fresh claims were continuously being made. Mr. Yardley, into whose hands she had now thrown everything, was amazed at the lack of fore-sight and the total absence of discretion that she had shown when dealing with Mrs. Harland. In her blind haste she had accepted every kind of obligation. Mr. Yardley was severe with her. and spoke of a lesson far too dearly bought.

She emerged at last crestfallen, ashamed, with self-confidence broken at least for a time. She had forfeited her reputation. Any strength derived from being more capable at business than Andrew had gone from her. As to money matters they were two of a kind. Indeed she had here proved herself worse than he; for he had never believed in the shop. He had known it was no good, and nevertheless he had toiled for it gaily and unflinchingly. And now when he would have been fully justified in saying "I told you so" he refrained.

She was grateful to him for his magnanimous reticence.

With the whole loss written off, she still had enough money left for them to live fairly comfortably in some country village or small town, and she believed that, if tardily wise, this was what they should do. But she dreaded the perils of such an experiment. The terrible dulness of country life on the smallest scale is enough to test the endurance of anybody. For a man to whom the country had meant shooting, hunting, point-to-point races, fast motor cars, and all sorts of costly amusements, it might well be quite unbearable. In imagination she saw him thus established and shrank from the vision. It would be more dangerous than Westmouth.

But they might attempt it later when they were more sure of themselves. Temporarily, then, they went into some quite decent rooms in Bloomsbury. They would take time to pull themselves together, and there should be no more wild enterprises.

Within a week Andrew found employment. He said he had been lucky enough to get in with some motor people, and she understood that it was a big concern, offering very favourable prospects. Fortunately, too, its offices were conveniently near the lodgings. He went there early in the morning and came back about seven in the evening. Sometimes he was later. Once, after he had been there ten days, he sent a message scrawled in pencil on a rather dirty bill-head to say she must not expect him till she saw him. That evening he did not return till eleven. She looked at him anxiously; but he was all right, only very tired. Too tired to talk, he said himself.

The days were miserably long for her. She had not realised what a sense of loneliness would fall upon her when compelled to be so many vacant hours without him. If this went on, she too must get some sort of day job to occupy her and drive away unwelcome thoughts. Then one evening at about half-past six she felt a sudden impulse to go to the offices, wait there for him, and walk home with him. There could be no harm in that. He could not possibly mind her doing it. She put on her hat and hurried off.

The place was in a side street on the northern side of the Euston Road. Far from looking important or official, it seemed to be a common ordinary kind of garage. A stout red-faced man dressed in a suit of brown hollands came out of a small room with a glass front and stared at her as she hesitated in the entrance.

"Anything I can do for you?" he said, with a forbidding gruffness.

She asked for Mr. Lane.

"What do you want with Lane?" said the man curtly.

"He's my husband."

"Oh!" The man gave a grunt as of dissatisfaction. Then he moved through the vaulted entrance towards the dimly-lit interior, where many cars were standing, and shouted authoritatively, "Lane, come here. Your missis asking for you."

Andrew came to her, from the car that he was cleaning. He wore blue overalls, and his hands were black and wet. The hair on his perspiring forehead was all matted. He seemed shy and embarrassed, but he greeted her with a not unkind smile.

"So you've hunted me out? All right. Nearly seven, isn't it? Very well, I'll change my things and be ready before you can look round."

She heard him then speaking to another of the underlings.

"Dick, old boy, be a good pal and finish this off for me."

On their way home he talked to her diffidently and apologetically.

"I don't say it's great shakes at present—but it may lead to something better. An opening, what! Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte."

She made him give up this degrading employment, although she thought him noble to have undertaken it. He shrugged his shoulders and submitted. Of course she must have things her own way.

Had she done wrong? She herself was not sure. But she simply could not bear it. It was too plain an admission of complete failure. Her splendid man to be in menial service and take orders from a red-faced brute. Besides, his working associates would want him to sink to their low level. He could not consort with them and remain aloof. On the contrary he would make no attempt to keep them at a dis-

tance. His actual words to one of them echoed in her ears, and again set them tingling with distress and humiliation. "Dick, old boy, be a pal . . ." The danger of low company was only less than the other danger.

She had him at home again. For the better part of every day they were together. He took her for longish walks, and often walked about the streets by himself. Sometimes of an afternoon he went to the Napier Club, and returning talked excitedly of remarkable conversations there in which he had taken no part beyond that of an attentive listener. It was the old story all over again—chatter of getting rich quick, of tips, inside information, good things that nobody as yet knew of.

That infernal club—she hated and dreaded it, while feeling contempt for it. In the beginning it had seemed to serve a useful purpose. Now she wished its destruction. Her good sense recoiled from the picture of folly that was evoked by his descriptions of the club smoking-room, where these grown-up men sat like babies, dreaming of money, telling each other silly fairy tales, waving their hands in front of their heated faces so as to see El Dorado more clearly through the mist of tobacco smoke.

But when she ventured to warn him against attaching value to such people's nonsense, he laughed, gave a shrug of the shoulders, and then looked about the sitting-room with sudden gloom in his eyes.

"Well, you know, we must really try to get out of this—somehow. We don't want to stick in the slough of despond for *ever*, do we? We must look for a bit of luck that will pull us out."

"Poor Andrew," she murmured compassionately. "D'-you feel it's so very bad?"

"Oh, no. Besides it's no worse for me than it is for you . . . But *you* see! We'll come out on top in the end."

Their good time was over.

Margaret was like a traveller who has left the sunny South of Europe and is speeding northward towards colder, darker lands. One looks out of the window of the train and involuntarily shivers. So much that is beautiful has been left behind. So little that is not ugly and forbidding lies ahead. A tendency to escape from the present and live again in the past was something new that she had to struggle against, because she recognised its weakening effect upon her. Strength seemed perceptibly to ebb when she looked back at the long idyll of their honeymoon, at the brilliant interlude of frivolous amusement among fashion's followers, the robust and jovial experience of men's society, with all the noisy talk, the meals in Soho's eating-houses, the cheap entertainments; or even at the fruitless bustle and unremunerative labour of the ill-fated shop. Even that was delightful and inspiriting compared with this dismal monotony, this inactive waiting for things that never happened.

She shook off the enervation of retrospective musings as best she could. Courage—and a good heart. As dear Andrew said, all would be right in the end. She could not, she would not begin to doubt.

It was the worst period of the year. A wet, dark autumn seemed to be folding this drab region of Bloomsbury to its clammy bosom, making the streets and squares and gardens merely a part of itself. The days shortened. Daylight became rarer—muddy pavements, fog, lamplit windows. On some days one could scarcely believe that out of sight here, but visible to more fortunate neighbourhoods, the sun had really risen and sunk again.

The coal fire of their sitting-room smoked sometimes.

Their lodgings were decent, in a well-managed house, but of course devoid of many comforts. She felt but succeeded in rising above the little miseries that surrounded them. Their evening meal was so poor and scratchy an affair that they ceased to call it dinner. They dined at the luncheon hour and supped at dinner time.

Sitting by the fire before supper she used to listen for his footstep, and at the sound of it she sprang up and gave him a bright-faced cheerful welcome at the opened door.

"Is that you, Andrew?"

"Yes, here I am, Maggs. Any news? I've brought you the evening paper. But there's nothing in it."

He took off his rain-soaked overcoat. His trousers were splashed, his boots miry. He looked cold, tired, and almost shabby.

Then throughout the long evening they were alone together with no possible amusement, no distraction, no resource of any kind except what they could provide for themselves.

It worried her when she observed that air of incipient shabbiness about him. He did not neglect himself; he kept his hair properly cut; he was always cleanly shaved; but he no longer gave the impression of a well-dressed man with a large wardrobe to choose from. His clothes looked as if they were nearly worn out. The smoothness and natural lustre had gone from the fabric itself; instead there was a nasty shininess about the elbows of coats and the knees of trousers. But this should not have been so. The large stock of clothes that he had bought in the time of their grandeur ought to have lasted much longer than this. Then she noticed that he wore only two suits, using them on alternate days. She discovered the reason at last. He possessed no others. All but these had been sold or pawned.

Yet he had been frequently asking her for money. At first he asked with a shy abruptness, as if ashamed of the necessity that forced him to take the aid of a wife in order

to have a little cash in his pocket. But then gradually he made the demand with a careless off-hand manner. It had become a matter of course. He took her money with no more compunction than if she had been a male friend, a friend notoriously much richer than himself. Whatever he asked for she gave, only begging him to make it last.

"Listen," she used to say eagerly. "Do try to be economical. There is no margin for even the smallest extravagance."

But on two occasions he had some money of his own. Mr. Yardley, still dragging on with the disentanglement of old debts, unexpectedly found that some trifling sums had fallen in to his ruined client. The first time it was thirty pounds. Andrew cashed the cheque, and returning to the lodgings spread out the nice unsoiled notes on a table.

"Look at it," he said jubilantly. "Thirty of the best! What ages since I have seen such a proud gathering. Ten —twice ten—three times ten of them." Then he pushed twenty of the notes towards her, and said they were for her. When she demurred to taking so much, he added five more notes to her pile. "Those for your very self—not for housekeeping . . . There, pick them up quick," he said, laughing. "Put them away out of sight before I'm tempted to grab them back . . . Sure you don't think me selfish in hanging on to a fiver myself?"

"Listen," she said. "I think you are more than generous. If I take it, it's because it may be safer with me. You know you can have it when you want it."

The second windfall was lighter. Mr. Yardley's cheque was for twenty pounds. They shared this amount equally, but Andrew made a bad hole in his half by buying two stalls at a theatre and giving her an expensive dinner before the play. She tried hard but vainly to prevent this extravagance. The thought of the wasted money spoiled all her enjoyment, although she felt obliged to tell him that she had had a very happy evening.

"That's right," he said. "Only one life, after all. Care killed a cat. Must let loose once in a blue moon, eh? . . . Now what about a bit of supper?"

"No, dear, I simply couldn't eat a morsel. And you have spent so much already. Let's get home."

How much had it cost—the tickets, the cabs, the restaurant bill, the gratuities? She could not guess. But three days after the treat he asked if she could let him have a tenner. He was penniless.

On that night of unusual festivity he had drunk a little wine during dinner. He left her between the acts of the play and had probably taken some more drink at the theatre bar. Perhaps that speech about the occasional abrogation of prudent rules had been intended to imply an apology or an assurance.

But she was aware that he had again abandoned his vows of total abstinence. He drank sometimes at the club and at other places. She knew and did not want to know. She asked no questions. Directly he returned to her she saw that it had happened.

His speech was never in the slightest degree affected. But there was a flush on his face and his eyes were very bright. His manner was restless; he kept moving about the room and showed an unnatural gaiety. He read things to her from the newspaper and laughed. Things that were not really funny struck him as extraordinarily amusing.

At supper he talked volubly but ate very little. Then he would go to bed early. Next day he was his usual self, but perhaps rather listless and apathetic, inclined to stay indoors instead of getting out and about.

She refused to allow these lapses to trouble her seriously. Once again she dismissed fear. She told herself that she ought to feel reassured rather than menaced. Nothing could better prove the completeness of the cure than his capacity to drink a little and not too much. It implied a firmly-established self-control.

But indeed, although she argued in this comforting manner, she might have been perturbed, if she had not had a far greater anxiety. This was caused by a progressive doubt as to the actual state of his feelings in regard to himself. The change that she had begun to see at Hampstead was becoming more and more perceptible.

One evening she heard a second footstep on the stairs, and the sound of another voice mingled with Andrew's.

"Here's an old friend," said Andrew contentedly, as he stood in the doorway hiding the other person from view. "Guess and guess again."

It was George Ryan.

"Well, George, I *am* glad to see you," she said cordially.

And in fact she was really glad. The sight of him was pleasant. His unexpected presence was entirely welcome after the dull weeks during which they had met no friends of any sort whether old or new. He was just the same, exactly according with all her memories of him—kind brown eyes, high cheek bones, freckled face, dark chin, broad, teeth-showing smile; explosive words, slight Irish accent, and that queer suggestion, derived from aspect, voice, manner, that he was not really an almost middle-aged person with duties and responsibilities to an adult world, but only a good-humoured and entirely irresponsible schoolboy. That he felt genuinely pleased to be with them again was unquestionable. He stood on the hearth-rug, rubbing his hands together and laughing in satisfaction.

"Mrs. A.—Mrs. A.—how jolly this is. The long-lost reunited! Why did you desert me? Surely one of you could have hung out a flag—sent up a rocket—or at least written a postcard to tell me what had become of you. I nearly advertised in the agony column. But then I thought you

must have gone to the Antipodes—at the very nearest. Never mind. Here we are again—poor little Georgey—old Andrew, full of bounce and impudence—and Mrs. A.—*our* Mrs. A., fit, hearty, ravishingly beautiful. Really A.1. Without flattery. Mrs. A.1." And he shook hands with her for the second or third time.

She invited him to stay for their frugal meal. But he said that to-night they must come out with him. He made them go. For once it was not raining. They walked on dry pavements under a clear sky, and dined very happily at the big hotel in Russell Square.

"He's nice," said Margaret, when they had parted from their host and were walking homeward.

"One of the best," said Andrew.

"Yes, I always liked him," said Margaret.

George, having recovered his friends, clung to them staunchly. Just as he had done before, he made a place in their life and dropped into it quite naturally and easily. Often he came to supper, but always bringing with him a basket of the food known as "delicacies" that he had bought on his way at Fortnum and Mason's or another of those universal providers. They had a picnic without being waited on by the lodging-house servant. A light beer in bottles was permitted. Then, as soon as the meal was over, Margaret set to work with the coffee machine, and for the rest of the evening served strong coffee on demand.

It was jolly. They chattered and laughed. A sort of triangular chaffing match, started by George Ryan, ran merrily. They could say what they liked to one another. Certainly George brought gaiety as well as those welcome additions to the bill of fare. These evenings were perhaps what the Lanes had been sorely needing, a break in the routine of close companionship, some alien influence to draw them away from themselves.

George was still more or less a City man. His rather vague connection with one or two firms of stockbrokers had continued. He said that they were eminent firms and he was lucky to be with them. Then, as he had done once before, he said he would arrange for Andrew to enjoy similar privileges. Margaret and Andrew discussed the proposal, and it was with her consent that he took advantage of it. She supplied the cost of a new blue suit, made by a good tailor in Savile Row, and a bowler hat from Lock's. With a much-improved appearance he resumed his visits to the haunts of finance. He was to work there, if any work could be found for him, and presumably be paid for working. He had promised not to consider the City as a Tom Tidler's Ground, but a place where gold and silver are to be picked up only by earning them. No more flutters!

She had discussed the thing with their friend, too, briefly, but very earnestly.

"George, swear you won't lead him astray."

George Ryan swore, by several fantastic symbols, and made pantomimic gestures indicating that he wished to be stabbed to the heart or have his throat cut if he ever betrayed the confidence that was reposed in him.

The business connection brought them closer together. Their intimacy developed. George looked in at any hour, on his way to the City or returning from it. Generally he was with Andrew, but sometimes he came by himself. Once or twice he took Margaret for a walk. Once they had tea at a restaurant where there was music and dancing. He wanted her to dance with him, but she flatly refused to do this.

As soon as they were alone he usually attempted to grasp the ends of a broken thread and join them. But she wished them to remain severed. In reply to exaggerated compliments and languishly admiring glances, she became motherly and matter-of-fact, and laughed while she rebuked him.

"Now, George, don't begin that nonsense all over again."

"But is it nonsense, Margaret? Or is it the very natural revival of an old infatuation—the spellbound victim surrendering for a second time to the enchantress who previously laid him low?"

"How can you be so utterly absurd? Or do you think I'm such a fool that I don't understand that when you talk like this you never mean a word you say."

"But suppose I mean many more words than I say—than I *dare* say? Whole dictionaries of them!"

She laughed at him, and presently he laughed with her.

"What a boy you are still. Of course you'll never grow up now. I think I shall have to call you Peter Pan."

"Do. And I'll call you Darling."

"Indeed you won't."

"Why not? It's the name of the people in the play."

"Is it really? Yes, I believe you're right. I'd forgotten. That's rather good," and she laughed. Then she was maternal, severe, and she frowned. "This is another thing. Why am I Mrs. A. as long as Andrew is there, and the moment his back is turned you address me as Margaret? I haven't told you to."

"Do you mind? I won't if you mind."

She reflected for a moment before answering him.

"No, of course I don't mind. Why should I? But please call me Margaret in Andrew's presence as well as out of it."

"Very good. But must we have it Margaret all the time? I liked Mrs. A."

"Yes, I liked it too." She said this gaily and happily; and as they walked on she dropped the manner of a slightly offended elder.

"We must turn now," she said presently. "Home, please."

"So soon? Is *this* time nearly over? Have I only *next* time

to live for? You don't answer. Margaret, when do we meet again?"

"I don't know. Perhaps never."

"Oh, no?"

"Here we are," she said briskly, when they reached her doorstep. "Good-night. And thank you for taking me out."

"Thank *you* for letting me."

He took off his hat and bowed low, in a fantastic reverence.

She would not for a moment encourage him in what she always described as his silliness. She cut him short, begged him not to talk rot, and advised him to find somebody younger and softer with whom he could exhaust his dictionary. Nevertheless the things he said to her, with the ridiculous pretence of admiring her and being the slave of her charm, warmed her heart and gave her courage, even while she laughed at them. For an entirely secret reason the compliments of any man would have gratified her at this period.

Once she said to him abruptly, "Sometimes you are a hopeless ass, George, but you have done me good."

And on another occasion soon afterwards, she asked him to answer a question quite seriously and truthfully, without chaff or nonsense of any kind. They were talking after tea. She had given him tea at home.

"Tell me," she said, "as man to man. Do I look much older than when you and I first met?"

"Not a day."

"Really and truly?"

"Honour bright."

"Very well;" and she was earnest and intent, watching his face, as if ready to read any thoughts that he did not care to utter. "Of course now we know each other. I like you. You like me. At any rate we get on together. We have become friends. But when people reach that stage I doubt

if they see each other clearly any more . . . Now will you please dismiss all that from your mind and tell me honestly—without joking—what you would think of me if to-day we were meeting for the very first time?"

"What I should think? I don't quite understand."

"Well, wouldn't you think I was rather uninteresting, rather the worse for wear, altogether too old and dull for anybody to bother about?"

He shook his head.

"You probably wouldn't notice me at all," she continued. "I should make no impression either way . . . You couldn't possibly think I was good-looking?"

"Yes, I should—and better than good-looking. Margaret, I don't know what you're getting at. But this is the truth—the whole truth—and nothing but the truth." He was speaking with as much seriousness as she demanded, his brown eyes clear and steady, his voice kind and friendly. "If I met you in the street to-day for the very first time, as a total stranger, I should say to myself, 'That's a woman I'd like to know.' I should want to follow you, to find out where you lived, and somehow scrape acquaintance. Then directly I did know you, it would begin. I should be more and more taken by you. I don't say you're a woman who knocks everybody over at long range—or makes people go off with a bang. Your effect is cumulative, and in some respects it's unique. Margaret, my dear, no one could be with you for long without being terribly fond of you."

"As a friend—a pal?"

"No, as everything else—from friendship right up the scale to frenzy;" and his seriousness relaxing, he grinned at her largely.

"Don't begin to laugh—or you'll prevent my believing what you've said."

"Believe it—as gospel truth."

She thanked him.

"Thank you, George. There's no doubt that you do

buck me up. I shall try to believe it because I want to. There. A friend in need is a friend indeed."

But their friendship had a shake-up, and she soon was imploring him not to spoil it or render it impossible.

This happened one evening when they had all three gone to a cinema. Andrew, as he himself confessed, was not clever at films. He read the explanations on the screen so slowly that they vanished before he had reached the end of them. The shadowy figures growing large and small before his troubled eyes seemed so much alike that he could not distinguish one from another. He watched the villain thinking he was the hero, and mistook the vamp for the innocent heroine. Under these conditions the plot of the story altogether baffled him and he grew weary of the struggle to unravel it. To-night he was so palpably bored that, when half the entertainment was over and the lights went up for the interval, before the other item on the programme began, Margaret, although herself amused, suggested that they should go away.

Andrew, admitting that he might be glad to escape, said he would not go unless Margaret and George consented to stay.

"I can see you're both enjoying it, and I know I ought to be too. But somehow I miss the point . . . Take care of her, George. By-by, Maggs."

He went. Then directly the lights were turned down George drew one of her hands from her lap and held it firmly till she jerked it free.

"Take off your glove," he whispered, "and give your hand back to me."

She shook her head.

"Quite the usual thing at cinemas," he whispered. "Always done. Half the people here are doing it. Contact is necessary for the full enjoyment of——"

"Oh, do be quiet."

Leaving the theatre, he wanted to get a taxi-cab, but she would not let him. She said she preferred to walk home. It was no distance.

As they emerged from the crowd he put his hand through her arm and endeavoured to keep it there. She shook him off.

"Why not?" he asked. "It's quite right my taking your arm. Only if you took mine it might be unfashionable."

Then as they went on she talked to him reproachfully.

"I don't like you a bit to-night, George—not a little bit. You're being stupid. Please stop."

At the house he asked if he might go up with her to the sitting-room.

"Yes," she said, "come up and say good-night to Andrew. He will expect you to."

Andrew had not yet returned. The sitting-room was empty. George, on the threshold, asked permission to come in for a few minutes. She said yes, he might stay till Andrew came back, but only on condition that he behaved himself.

He closed the door, and in a moment he had his arm round her shoulders and held her while she wrestled with him violently.

"George—you fool—let me go."

He answered her with incoherent protestations of love. He was trying to kiss her, pulling her face towards his, hotly striving for a forced embrace if she would not give him a willing one. He did not succeed. Her defence was not the feeble opposition that is made for the sake of propriety. Using all her strength she released herself.

Out of breath, very angry, with burning cheeks, she stood against the wall of the room, and in effect asked him what he meant by the committal of such an outrage.

"Are you mad?"

He made the orthodox reply. "If I am, you have made

me." He was half sulky, half ashamed, and plainly much disappointed.

"Why did you lead me on?"

"I didn't. It's disgusting of you to say so. Suppose I tell Andrew what you've said and done!"

"Would Andrew care?"

"How dare you say that! Would he care! You'd very soon find out whether he cared or not."

"He neglects you. You're much too good for him."

"That isn't true. And if it were, it's hateful of you to say it. You—his friend."

"Nobody could be good enough for you. I shouldn't be, myself. But gosh, I wish it was I who had you, and not Andrew."

Saying this he sat down and looked sad and contrite. Then came quieter reproaches from her, together with the entreaties to him to be sensible and not ruin those friendly relations that had been established between them. Quite calm now, she was motherly to him—more and more so. She said she was so ignorant of the ways of men that she did not know whether they always made love to any woman they were with, just for fun, or to test their luck. But George ought to be above that kind of amusement. He was far too nice to play at being a universal lover.

"No," he said. "I meant business. But all right, Mrs. A. I shan't worry you again. You tell me there's nothing doing. That's enough."

"Nothing's doing, and nothing ever can be doing," she said firmly. "Not because I don't think you very nice—but because with you or anybody else either, that sort of thing is simply meaningless to me. . . . I want you to understand. Then we can go on again just the same. You spoke the other day of the appeal of individuals to individuals—how men and women *suit* each other, or were intended by Nature to suit—so that then the response of the woman's side is almost automatic. Well, I am literally without re-

sponse except to one person. I am nothing—a lamp-post, a brick wall . . . This is the simple truth . . . Andrew! In all my life there has only been one man. There *couldn't* be another."

Then she knelt on the hearthrug and stirred the fire.

"What a time he is!" And she got up and looked at the clock.

"Do you want me to go?" said George.

"No, wait for him. Shall I make you some coffee?"

"No, thank you. But do you mind if I smoke?"

"Why do you ask? . . . Give me a cigarette . . . Thanks."

They sat on each side of the fire smoking their cigarettes and talking quietly. George after a little while spoke of himself, telling her of his present and past circumstances. To a certain extent they were very like Andrew's. He had had a good deal of money to begin with and had somehow got rid of most of it. He hoped for a stroke of luck. Without it he might eventually have to do a dash for one of the Colonies.

"Why have you never married?"

"I scarcely know. I have often been near marrying." Then he laughed for the first time since the upset. "I am not very remote from doing it now."

"Oh, but this is splendid." Margaret was tremendously interested. "Please tell me all about it. Who is the lady? What's she like? Are you engaged to her?"

"More or less."

"Then how wicked of you—— But never mind that. Go on telling me."

"She's not like you."

The lady, Margaret gathered, was not very young, not very attractive, but a real good sort. She and George had known each other for a long time. There would be no romance in such a marriage. But very likely it would turn out satisfactorily. He said, "We know what to expect—and what it's no use expecting."

Margaret spoke wisely and sympathetically. She might have been his grandmother advising him. She said she felt sure that he ought to do it. He needed somebody to look after him. Why had he hesitated?

"First because of you—and secondly because of money. I shan't be able to do it unless things turn up trumps for me."

Time had passed. She looked at the clock again.

"I can't think what's keeping Andrew. He must have gone for one of his long tramps."

"And you're tired," said George, rising from his chair. "Good-night, Margaret," and he held out his hand. "Is all forgiven and forgotten?"

"Absolutely," she said, shaking hands.

"Real friends?"

"Yes."

"Stick to that. Think of me like that. A friend you could rely on at any time."

She stood in the doorway and smiled at him as he went down the stairs.

Then she sat waiting for Andrew.

She had been in the bedroom to take off her hat and brush her hair, and while there she examined herself in the looking-glass. The light was not strong, but she seemed to see an unusual brightness and animation in the reflected face. It had natural colour, its cheeks looked smooth and firm. Her lips were almost as if she had reddened them. She breathed deeply and easily; it seemed as though her heart had grown lighter and was doing its work better than of late.

Sitting by the replenished fire, she felt an irrepressible elation of the spirits. She smiled and frowned. Silly George! Of course it had all been rubbish. If he had been really in earnest she would have felt very sorry for him. But he hadn't been—except just for a minute or two of suddenly roused feeling that would be forgotten already. An emotion

that went as quickly as it came! Nevertheless, there might remain with her, not with him, a memory of to-night that was almost inestimably precious. He had given her something for which she was bitterly craving, a proof that at least there was nothing about her to repel. Physically she could still attract. Men could still think her desirable. Courage. It was foolish as well as cowardly to have these recurrent fears.

At last she heard the ascending footsteps.

"Andrew! How late you are! What *have* you been doing?"

"Walking—miles and miles. Up to Highgate—over the hills and far away . . . Well, did you and George have a good yarn?"

"Yes."

"He came back here of course?"

"Yes. We expected to see you—at any minute."

"Has he been gone long?"

"Yes, for nearly an hour."

Andrew was quite himself. He had not taken any drink. But he seemed preoccupied, thinking his own thoughts and scarcely attending to what he or she said. He relapsed into silence, and she stood looking at him as he moved some books on the sideboard and picked up a newspaper.

"What a walk!" she said.

He nodded without speaking, without looking at her, and seated himself at the table.

"Well, aren't we going to bed?"

"You go," he said, unfolding the newspaper and bringing a pencil from his waistcoat pocket. "I think I'll sit and read a bit—that is, I want to do the cross-word puzzle."

"At this time of night? . . . Oh, very well."

She went slowly into the bedroom and closed the door. He had not looked at her. Whatever her aspect, he did not notice it. She might be red or white, she might be bright or dull, and he would not be aware of any change, any differ-

ence. As she undressed, her heart felt heavier than lead. When she looked in the glass the face she saw seemed pale, drawn, haggard, like the face of a mortified and unhappy woman.

He wanted to plunge into a new venture.

Without prelude he asked if she would go double or quits on past losses, because he could show her how they might get everything back almost to a certainty. And he spoke for the first time of that unlucky shop. All she had lost in the shop might be recovered "with a good bit more into the bargain." But it was a case of now or never.

"It's the San Bartolommeo Concessions, and——"

She refused to hear him. She would not for a moment contemplate any further risks, small or big—and this was evidently a big one.

"I wonder that you yourself can think of it, Andrew. How can you be so credulous?" And she said that she supposed it was another tale of folly told to him at the club.

He said no. The club had nothing whatever to do with it. It was a piece of inside information that had been obtained by George Ryan.

"Talk to George about it. George is going in—up to the neck. He *is* in already, and is only waiting to raise money to put in all he has got."

When she next saw George she reproached him bitterly for letting loose this trouble upon her. It was cruel of him. For he had solemnly promised not to lure Andrew into danger.

George protested that he was innocent. He had never suggested that Andrew should follow his example, or invest a penny in the affair. On the other hand it had been impossible to make a secret of what he himself proposed

to do. He could not decently have withheld from Andrew the special knowledge that had come into his possession. Nor could he help letting Andrew see his own firm belief that San Bartolommeo was a tremendously good thing.

"Yes, but you're a gambler. You said so yourself."

"Honestly, Mrs. A., you can't call this a gamble."

He was kind and considerate in all that he said. He understood that what might be a right course of action for him might be a very wrong one for Andrew. But he begged her not to attempt to shake his own confidence, or to fail to give him credit for good faith.

"Look here, Mrs. A. I am staking everything. Since we talked, I have made up my mind. I do want to get married. If this thing goes down I lose my wife. I go straight out to West Australia."

Finally he said that if as a friend he gave her his own opinion, he would have advised her to let Andrew follow his lead, but, since she was opposed to any participation in what he believed to be a glorious chance, he would use every means to "choke off" Andrew.

He did not, however, fulfil his promise. He was obviously unable. His own enthusiasm was necessarily contagious. Beginning with a faithful intention of pulling Andrew back, he nevertheless was always pushing him on. Then, carried away on a flood of high hopes, he seemed to forget the obligation altogether.

And now, day after day she was subjected to a heavy pressure; with strong purpose from Andrew, and involuntarily on the part of George Ryan. They were continually talking about San Bartolommeo Concessions in her presence. She had to listen. They forced her to show interest.

It was an English company, an already well-established and successful company, with wide and varied concessions in Brazil. Its mining rights included copper, tin, and gold—these last of as yet unestimated value. The directors were hard-headed important people. The men behind the direc-

tors were the biggest of big pots—one of the shipping lords, a great banker, an ex-cabinet minister, and so on. Men of that calibre don't back anything that isn't solid as rock and vigorous as a young oak tree. Besides, the public themselves recognised that the company was worth while. They supported it stoutly.

Margaret asked questions that sounded shrewd enough.

"If it is as good as all that, why hasn't it a quotation on the Stock Exchange?"

"It *has*," said George, and he told her that the one-pound shares were about par. They had closed to-day at a fraction over nineteen shillings. "Where's a newspaper? See for yourself."

"But you don't mean to make a real investment. You're going to speculate in differences or margins, or whatever you call them?"

They both answered her at once. Certainly not. No speculating. The shares were to be bought out and out.

"You used to say that everything was discounted beforehand. Surely the present price of the shares must comprise all the value of future prospects."

No. She had touched the key of the situation. There was something that the public did not know, but that George Ryan and a very few others did know. A recent discovery within the company's reservations. Gold reefs the existence of which till lately was unsuspected. The big-wigs had sent out to Brazil a confidential commission made up of a mining expert, a business-man, and a lawyer. After examining everything, they were to make a report. The report would come in January, perhaps sooner. The report would certainly be more than favourable; it would disclose the amazing potential wealth of the company. Directly after the publication of the report the shares would soar. They would go to two pounds, three pounds—to ten pounds very likely.

So it went on. Weeks passed. George had completed his

purchases. Andrew forlornly repeated that catch-word about now or never. It was still now, but soon it would be an irremediable never.

"We have looked at it all round," he said, "and we can't see a possible snag. You must remember that at the worst it's a going concern."

"Oh, for mercy's sake, don't use that expression."

She thought he was alluding to the fatal shop. But he was not. Except on that one occasion he had never spoken of the shop. She herself spoke of it several times.

"Listen, dear. Because I made a fool of myself is no reason why anybody else should. You talk of double or quits. But think. We have so much less left. We should be jeopardising our safety."

"Or win right out. . . . But it isn't like that really"; and he said that if the shares didn't go up, he could not see why they should go badly down. In any event a dividend would be declared next February. This should surely keep the price near its present level. Or if it sagged it couldn't go far the wrong way. They ought to be able to get out without a substantial loss.

She could not believe. Prudence, judgment, instinct, prevented her from believing in the thing. Moreover, whether good or bad, it was not for them. On principle she must decline it. She must not allow herself for the sake of temporary peace to be bullied or cajoled into acquiescence. But to resist became heart-breakingly difficult. More than once she wavered. More than once she felt herself being talked into a submission that was almost like belief.

On an evening when George was supping with them, she had this uncomfortable feeling of giving way in spite of herself, of surrendering to the contagion, of thinking what they thought.

George chattered about the history of other companies of a similar character and their staggering success. He cited instances. The White Mountain Deep, the Miguel River,

the Alderberg Proprietary! Each of these had suddenly come into overwhelming prosperity. Everybody connected with them had made a fortune. They had split their shares again and again. Every original shareholder to-day had twenty shares for the one he began with. And if so, why not Bartolommeo?

Above all, he had banked on the comparative smallness of the Bartolommeo's share capital.

"Here, give me an envelope—anything. Where's my pencil? Let me figure it out. A year's profit of a bare hundred thousand would mean a division at the rate of . . ."

He was wild in his enthusiasm.

When he had gone, Andrew said that the time had come for her to decide one way or the other.

She put her hand to her forehead despairingly. Her head was aching. She paced the room. Was she to give in, *must* she give in? Then sufficient strength came. Her resolution stood firm against this last turn of the screw.

"Don't be angry with me, Andrew dear, but I can't—really and truly, I can't."

"Good," said Andrew quietly. "It was entirely for you to decide."

"But, you know, I simply hate refusing."

"Good," he repeated. "Don't worry. You had the best of all rights to say no—and you have said it."

An hour later, after they had gone to bed, she said yes.

It was done. She had sold debentures, first preference shares, trustee stocks, and in exchange she held a large block of San Bartolommeo Concessions Ordinary. She felt like somebody who has jumped at night from a ship into the open sea.

But she swam bravely. She and her companion would

reach land. She forced herself now to a belief in the coral ring, the fringe of palms, the fairy island, that lay hidden in the darkness. Soon the dawn would show it; their feet would touch the golden sands; they would lie down in warmth and sunshine, to awake from refreshing sleep and enjoy all they had struggled for.

She talked of the future as enthusiastically as he did. They had made a compact that when their end was gained they would leave London and live in the country. He said now that he would welcome the change, and he was sure that they could get along famously in some nice rural shelter. She should choose it.

From the moment of committal to the great adventure, his spirits had risen. The days were full of interest and pleasant excitement for him, and his gratification showed in constant good-humour and frequent gaiety. Of course he was living with a dream. And the dream incessantly expanded. They would certainly do better than retrieve past losses. They perhaps were about to fall in for one of the biggest booms that the City had ever seen. They would be well-off—affluent—wealthy—"rolling."

He bought another new suit of clothes and some new hosiery. He was smart again. On the strength of all these bright prospects he spent money more freely and begged her to follow his example. She ought to refit herself with pretty frocks and hats and what not.

She echoed the hopeful talk, and gradually hope became like confidence. It was as if she had come at last firmly to believe everything that he believed. It *must* be all right. Fate had not been too kind to them. Fate could not be keeping another bad turn in store for them.

But truly, although this matter was of life-and-death importance, she felt often that it merely lay on the surface of her real existence. Beneath this and all other cares that could possibly assail her, there lay the far greater anxiety, the always returning dread, as to the essential bond be-

tween him and her. In all this time the change had been slowly progressing. She was poignantly conscious of the slow but cumulative loss. His affection perhaps had grown stronger, and she believed that this was true, but to what pallid cold ashes were the warmer fires dying? He was her grateful friend, her companion, but what had happened to her lover?

In any actual demonstrations of love he was the wooed and not the wooer. Ardour came not as a command but as a reply. He gave, she took. Tolerant or generous he would, if she ever sought it, still grant a simulation of a past reality. But this could not satisfy her. She felt an effort that he never quite concealed. She suffered during moments that should have been full of joy; she feared worst when she should have been most reassured.

Was he unfaithful to her? She did not think so. Instinctively she seemed to know that he had not as yet broken faith with his marriage oaths. But instinct told her too, that what is denied to one person is sooner or later offered to others. Little as she knew of men, that must surely be a universal law. He enjoyed great freedom. He walked amidst temptations—coarse, vulgar temptations, but perhaps sufficient to overcome his restraints or reluctances. In the past he had not been discriminating. Common little waitresses, programme sellers, the poor cheap girls of this vast London, were refined and delicate if compared with the creatures with whom he had once consorted. Suppose that he fell back into the old ways!

"No matter what difficulties we may meet, I can never be jealous." That was what she used to say to herself again and again in the happy days of their early married life. The sick man of Westmouth, the husband of the honeymoon wanderings, the marvellous sweetheart of that exquisite pause at Naples, would never betray her. At least she would be immune from that particular danger. Her sustaining faith in the lasting character of his love was like

the solid ground beneath her feet. But time works terrible insidious changes. At the very first she had glowed with pleasure whenever she saw or fancied that women in public assemblies had noticed him with an interest not devoid of admiration. Then came very slightly jealous feelings, or at least thoughts that might eventually produce them. While they were gadding about with Dorothy Bickersdyke's friends she had often been transiently uncomfortable. The glances that she had enjoyed when they were shot at him from a distance became highly obnoxious when delivered at close range. She detested all that twaddle of unattached wives and emancipated young spinsters about getting on so well with him. The smallest suggestion of an incipient understanding between them and him troubled her greatly. She winced if he said a word of praise about any one of them. She thought, "I have him, but I must hold him." At other times she was ashamed, thinking, "He is so loyal to me, so unfailingly grateful. Above all, he is still so completely dependent on me." . . . Then at Hampstead qualms and twinges had developed into real pain. For a few days she had been distinctly jealous when he seemed to take too much notice of that red-haired, loose-lipped girl. She had cured herself of distress only by bundling the minx out of the place.

All that was nothing. But now what could she feel, what could she think? She was jealous of the unseen, the unknown. Unless she conquered these apprehensions she might regard the whole universe as threatening her peace. The sun would cease to shine. A coldness as of the long arctic night seemed to be creeping towards her.

His state of mind apparently made no difference. He was just the same now as a month ago. Even when happy and gay, grateful to her for her compliance with his wish, big with pleasant anticipations of the good time coming, he drew her no closer to him. He was kind, very kind. He was intimately confidential; but he treated her as if she had

been another man with whom he was well pleased to share diggings. She was his favourite pal, nothing more.

One evening she almost broke down. His affectionate words, his friendly taps and nudges, all the continual indications of a hearty good-fellowship, overcame her efforts to retain composure. She could not answer when he spoke to her. Then she stood in front of his chair and looked down at him. Stammering, nearly crying, she made a vague incoherent appeal.

"Oh, Andrew—Andrew—can't you see, don't you understand?"

"What's the matter?" Surprised, he got up and put his hands on her shoulders. "Maggs, my dear old girl, what's wrong?" He was grave, solicitous, tender. "Tell me."

"Oh, I don't know," she said piteously. "But you make me think such things. There. I'm worrying you," and she tried to smile. . . . "Say, just once, that you really like your plain old Margaret."

"She isn't plain, and I adore her."

"Not getting tired of me—not wishing I was somebody different?"

He kissed her fondly, and spoke with quite unusual earnestness. "I wouldn't change you for any woman alive."

She was delighted. She little guessed the sinister meaning that these words might come to bear, or the anguish of jealousy that she was to pass through.

There had been a renewal of love-making. For a few days their relations were again normal, and she was happy. Then a cloud seemed to fall upon him. His high spirits vanished. He answered her smiles and jokes with dark,

troubled looks and meaningless phrases. Laughter had deserted him altogether.

Coming back from the City one afternoon earlier than was his rule he offered every sign of the deepest depression. He refused to reply to her questions. He sat silent, heavily brooding, and at intervals emitted a sigh that dragged out until it was like a groan. At last he roused himself to speak to her.

"Look here. I had better tell you. I ought to have told you on Monday. But I was so staggered—and I hoped it would blow over, prove nothing after all."

"What is it?"

He told her there had been an ugly rumour that the Brazilian report had arrived, and that it was very unfavourable.

"Well," she said bravely, "what's a rumour?" They were sitting at the table, he on one side, she on the other, and she put her hand across it and touched him. "Courage, dear. You mustn't lose heart because of mere chatter. Nobody outside can *know*."

"I'm not sure," he said gloomily. "Something must have leaked out. There has been a good deal of selling. Today the price fell back badly."

He went on talking. It was in vain that she tried to cheer him. Once again their habitual positions were reversed. She was the sanguine hoper, the believer in luck, the denier of ominous facts, and he was the doubter, the foreboder of disastrous tidings.

He ate no supper. He would not even smoke. When the table had been cleared he sat by it again, mute, oppressed, miserable.

"I shall never forgive myself if we go smash."

His voice startled her, for she too had sunk into deep thought.

"But there won't be a smash, Andrew. Don't let's be afraid."

He shook his head. "I am afraid—for your sake. No, I can't forgive myself if I've let you down."

"I shan't blame you, dear."

No more was said then. The time dragged on. After an hour's profound silence he turned to her and spoke with a slow, heavy tone.

"George Ryan is in love with you."

"What's that?" she said breathlessly. "No, you needn't repeat it. I heard. But it isn't so."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Don't, my dear. Of course he is—and you must have known it for a long time."

"Listen. You know yourself that he is engaged to be married."

"He would break off his engagement at a word from you."

"No, I'll tell you——" She began to talk rapidly, but he stopped her.

"My dear, I'm not making accusations. Far from it. I've only been thinking. If the worst comes to the worst—if this cursed thing collapses. . . . Well, you'd better let me go, and take up with George."

"*Andrew!*"

"Yes, let me clear out and leave you free to try your luck with him—or anybody else. Whoever it is, you won't do so badly as you have with me."

"So now I know," she said. Her face had hardened as it turned pale. She clasped her hands upon the table, and looked away from him. "Thank you for telling me the truth at last. Never mind the insult! But if you still cared for me in the slightest degree, you could never have said it. You meant to tell me plainly that you don't care for me."

"No, it's because I do care for you that I say it"; and he got up wearily and stood by the fire with his hands in his pockets.

"You're wicked and cruel."

A moment later she was clinging to him, kissing him, holding him with all her strength.

"Andrew, my own, I shan't ever mind about money. Only you. Without you I should die—go mad—kill myself. Except you, what have I got—what *have* I got? Tell me you didn't mean it. Darling, take it all back. Say you still want me. Say you can't do without me."

They sat then side by side, his arm round her waist, her hands pressed against him.

"Yes, I want you—I need you. But I'm not worth while." His voice was gentle, caressing; he spoke to her with an emotion that increased until it was so strong that he could hardly go on speaking. "You, good sweet Mags, I'm not worth while. You have been so wonderful. Nobody ever had such a second chance as you've given me. And I've tried—I've tried. On my honour I've fought hard—well, to be worthy of you. Not only about drink—but in other ways too. Will you believe this? I swear that I have fought hard."

"And you have won the fight." She was passionate, eager. "The fight is over. A splendid noble victory. Never doubt it. Never think that you could be beaten now."

"Bless you," he murmured with a sigh.

Later, when she was raking out the fire and putting things away in a cupboard before going to bed, he talked again sadly and moodily.

"You ought to have left me in that garage."

"I'm sorry. I dare say I ought to have. But then my pride——"

"False pride. It's all I'm fit for—to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow."

She said that he was fit for anything; but if he ever wanted to do that sort of work again she would not interfere.

"Perhaps too late"; and he said he doubted if he had sufficient energy left. "I feel like a clock that has had its

main-spring mended several times, but now it's finally broken. Past repair—even by you."

"Oh, nonsense. Utter rot, old boy." She was cheerful, almost gay. She said they were rushing to meet troubles halfway. All might still be well. Soon they would leave London and its nerve-strain and unhealthy excitement and enervating air far behind them. They would live in a jolly little cottage, perhaps with a river near. Then he could have a boat and sail, go fishing too, and dig in the garden. He would find then that he could work like a Trojan. "No, we're not done yet." And she stood in the bedroom doorway, nodding to him. "Will you be coming soon?"

"Yes. I'm coming now."

Some wretched weeks followed one another.

At a special general meeting of the company the chairman of the board made devastating announcements. It was the exhaustion of their copper and other mining property that had made them so anxious to develop their rights in gold. But the gold wasn't there—or not enough of it. There remained, however, many valuable assets. Only they must go slow. In the circumstances they had no alternative but to pass the annual dividend.

Then came the series of events that unfortunate experiences have made familiar on these occasions. At another meeting of shareholders the conduct of directors was stormily impugned and an independent investigation clamoured for. Directors retired or were obliterated; the magnates, shipping lord, banker, and the others, made it publicly known that they had withdrawn all countenance and interest; and meanwhile the price of shares fell, fell, fell. The hoped-for boom had been changed into a most atrocious slump. Everybody was a seller, nobody was a buyer.

Mr. and Mrs. Lane got out at last, skinned to the bone.

They moved to still cheaper lodgings. Margaret, with an aching head and hot, tired eyes, disconsolately struggling to make a clear estimate of their remaining resources, saw that at the outside they would have about two hundred a year. They could not live on it. She knew that Andrew would not try to live on it.

He seemed to be in a state of complete listlessness. He offered no suggestions, but left himself passive, inert, helpless, on her hands, allowing her to make all arrangements and settle everything as she pleased. He never grumbled about their enormous disaster, but sometimes he talked querulously, even angrily, in regard to quite trivial matters. He was like a man who lies in hospital with serious injuries from a street accident, and complains that his pillow is hard, or that there is a slight draught round the corner of the screen.

Margaret tended him, waited on him, regardless of her own discomfort endeavoured to make him comfortable. Feeling sick and faint she helped a feeble servant-girl at her work. She looked white and ill. She was herself aware of a great disturbance in her natural health. For a long time she had merely a suspicion of its cause. Then she knew. She told him that she was going to have a baby.

"Oh, God," he said, "that puts the lid on everything."

Her features twitched. She brought out a handkerchief and blew her nose.

"You're not very kind."

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to be unkind. No, heaven forbid. . . . Poor old girl! In for it, are you? How perfectly damnable—for you, I mean." Then he went on in a fretful worried tone, and presently made a wry face as if in supreme distaste. "I've never known anybody have a baby. . . . You'll want a nurse. What'd you call 'em?

Midwife! *Sage femme!* Oh, Lord. First doctor, then nurse, then both together—and I shall know you're down with it, in raging torment. Then squall, squall. A new small voice heard through the darkness of the night—as they say in books."

Margaret began to cry.

"It will be our child, Andrew."

"Oh, yes. We share the guilt. As much my fault as yours."

Their rooms were in the Westbourne Park district, against a wilderness of stucco-fronted houses that had seen better days and were now bitterly poverty-stricken. Once occupied by the prosperous middle-classes, each respectable tenant with one of them to himself, they had dropped to the hands of speculators and sweaters, who had divided them into flats, tenements, lodgings, and were rapidly creating still another of London's overcrowded areas. At one end of Margaret Lane's road there was a noisy tavern, about the doors of which the worst kind of loafers congregated as the time of opening approached; at the other end the street was cut off by a high, blank wall that stood above the sunken railway line. The shops to which she went on her daily round of marketing lay at a distance of half a mile, in a slightly superior neighbourhood. It seemed a long walk before one came to open thoroughfares with a traffic of omnibuses and motor-cars instead of merely vans, lorries, coal carts, and costermongers' barrows. To get a glimpse of anything interesting, such as the canal or Paddington Station, demanded too great an effort. Beauty, charm, trees beginning to bud, the shining expanses of bright vernal grass in a public park, crocuses, daffodils, primroses, blooming at the expense of ratepayers—all such amenities were far beyond walking distance.

Andrew stayed indoors a great deal. Sometimes he would sit at their window, looking down the street to the railway wall and watching the white puffs of steam rise above it as an invisible train passed. He had a tattered A.B.C. guide that had been left by a previous lodger. Consulting its pages and looking at his wrist-watch, he would announce that the Torquay or the Cheltenham express had just gone by. Sometimes he occupied himself for the whole day with

a single cross-word puzzle. In times of extremest difficulty, when he confessed himself as being at a standstill, he accepted eagerly offered assistance from her; but it made him angry if she inadvertently suggested a word with six letters instead of one with five as he required.

"Well, you needn't bite my head off," she said in gentle reproach. "I'll try again."

"No, please don't trouble."

From time to time his now habitual apathy gave place to sudden restlessness. So unexpectedly that the action startled her, he would spring from his chair and snatch up his hat. Excusing himself for leaving her, he hurried out of the house and walked fast away. The restless state usually lasted for two or three days, and then he was dull and quiet again. During it his irritability increased. He spoke rudely to her, even harshly.

But for the most part he showed an adequate consideration. His solicitude in regard to her condition was touching, even when rather absurd. If walking with her, he begged her to lean on his arm for support and to go very slowly. A dozen times he asked whether she felt tired. Any hesitation in her movements seemed to alarm him, and he suggested getting a cab and driving home at once. As though her trouble were already due instead of lying many months ahead, he seemed to fear that they might be caught unawares by it in a public and inappropriate place.

"Dear old Andrew," she murmured gratefully. "You are very sweet to me."

But then came those cruel rebuffs, wounding her, torturing her, and after a little while making her intensely angry as well as very miserable.

For instance, as they sat together one evening, she had what she thought was a happy idea and turned to him with a cheerful smiling face.

"Listen. I've something to tell you."

He replied as rudely as fretfully.

"Don't say 'Listen' every time you speak. I'm not deaf."

"Sorry. It's only a trick I have."

"Then break yourself of it."

That was the sort of thing that she bore without protest. Swallowing the bitterness of a natural resentment, she merely felt the pain caused by his rough tone and unloving glance. But another time, when she was saying she feared he did not get enough exercise, he stung her to both self-defence and burning anger.

He told her to stop nagging. He could not stand being nagged.

"So just stop it." And he added grumblingly, "Ena never nagged."

"What! Ena Talbot didn't nag? She nagged at you unceasingly—and you nagged at her. Besides, how dare you compare *me* with *her?*"

"Oh, shut up," he said loudly.

But she would not. Defiant, speaking almost as loudly as he had done, in a fury that surprised herself, she poured out a stream of wrathful words.

"You think you can say what you like to me, and insult me how you please. Yes, and I've put up with it for the sake of peace. But there are limits. If you dare to speak of me and that woman in the same breath, I tell you plainly, I'll——"

"Shut up," he shouted again.

But still she went on. With an oath, and saying something that in her anger she could not hear, he seized his hat. Next moment he had gone.

She was afraid then. Even while still throbbing and burning with resentment, she had a sense of shame. He had cruelly humiliated her, but she had humiliated herself too. How could she possibly have been so violent, changing every habit of mind, letting herself be blown from the safe anchorage of custom by a gale of passion? It was so entirely unlike herself, this outburst of violent indignation.

When he returned, after several hours, she apologised to him, just as she used to apologise to her mother in the old days. He forgave her, but it was a reconciliation without any kisses or kind words.

"That's all right," he said. "But don't do it again. Now this is serious"; and he was stern in tone, forbidding of aspect. "I don't want you ever to speak of Ena—and, what's more, I don't want you ever to think of her. Forget her altogether."

"Yes, I shall be only too glad to—if you won't remind me of her."

Their Sundays were difficult to both of them. A lifeless silence, broken only by the rare passing of trains, fell upon the dull empty street. It seemed that nearly always they had bad weather. Andrew slept a great deal, and yawned and stretched himself in grievous ennui when awake. Margaret stitched, darned, and read, if she had a book worth reading.

On one of these Sundays it had been raining since dawn; but after tea the weather cleared, and he took her for a longish walk. He said that he had refused an invitation to spend the evening with some men friends. He would not desert her.

Unexpectedly it began to rain again. A heavy shower swept the pavements and lashed the already flooded gutters.

Margaret and Andrew were now in a broad roadway beyond the Royal Oak Station. A bell was sounding from a church a little way ahead of them, and people were entering the open doors.

"We had better go in there for shelter," he said.

"But, Andrew, it's the evening service. If we go in we can't very well come out before the end."

"I don't mind," he said. "Anything's better than for you to get a ducking."

The rain fell faster, and they hurried to the church doors. The bell ceased as they reached them. Then directly they were seated the organ played, the choir and clergy appeared, the service began.

The building was modern, narrow and lofty, with the brickwork of the walls uncovered, and high above a false clerestory some painted windows of garish colours. The lamps were already lit, but in the last of the daylight they scarcely showed. An ugly church, Margaret thought.

But outside the dusk came quickly. The colour in the windows faded and soon was gone altogether. The lights glowed richly. As Margaret rose from her knees after the prayers the church seemed beautiful.

There were not many people in this evening congregation, and most of them women. Devout, too, entirely unobservant of their neighbours; so that Margaret and Andrew, sitting a little apart near a brickwork pier, at once had a feeling of comfortable isolation. The music, the singing, the orderly progress of the sacred rites, were pleasant, soothing to her nerves. In different ways she and he were both strongly affected.

Margaret, after making her own prayers, did not really listen to the service, although automatically following it. Andrew made no attempt to listen. He imitated his wife's movements, getting up and sitting down again when she did. His air was grave, even solemn. Then gradually each withdrew into the realm of individual thought.

For Margaret in every succeeding minute the thoughts flowed more calmly. They obeyed her, too, taking the steady course that she directed. Considering past troubles, she was able to achieve philosophic readjustments, new estimates of comparative importance. Things are never as bad as they look at first. We overcome difficulties, we live down pain, we forget and hope again. Once or twice during an address given by a priest standing at the lectern, she glanced at Andrew. He was sitting with head slightly

bowed, his hands clasped loosely between his knees. The motionless attitude, with the quiet strength and perfect self-control that it suggested, seemed further to comfort and reassure her, as if confirming the trustful hope that she had just felt for him in her thoughts. A deep, pure affection suffused her. She turned her head away, and, her eyelids closing for a moment on wet eyes, her face was tremulously soft and tender. If she had continued to look at him, she must have touched him, taking his hand, squeezed his arm, or made some other palpable sign of love . . . Courage. That's the watchword and the key. Go on trusting, go on hoping. When a child was born to them . . .

Her thoughts flowed widely, deeply, no longer being directed, but carrying her safely on their full stream, bringing her nearer and nearer to that which is greater than happiness, peace.

But it was not so with Andrew. His thoughts, at first vague and chaotic, soon took shape and meaning. They gathered force and began to do as they pleased with him. Soon they were irresistible, overwhelming. Yet still he struggled to combat them, feeling remorse and shame in the very moment of succumbing to them. He fought with words while they presented themselves in vivid pictures. So that he was like a man talking to himself as he sees an unending succession of things that he earnestly wishes to avoid seeing. . . . "No, certainly not." He said this to himself again and again. But the thoughts, the devastating thoughts, continued. "Why," he thought, "oh, why don't I like her as I ought to? Why should I get so cursedly sick of her? Why do I feel saddled with a burden that I can't shake off?" And pictures came to beat down resistance with the invincible disgust that they evoked. The alteration of her figure, as yet merely imagined by him and not actually existing, her drawn features, her sallow blood-tainted complexion, her careful way of moving, her slow,

heavy tread, her sober air of awaiting a catastrophe that was to be welcomed as a blessing! "Parturition! Oh, Lord." As he told her, in his experience of women he had never encountered this normal domestic phase. Horses, yes—but not girls. The breeding woman. The stud mare, with dropped belly, in a loose box full of straw. . . . "What an ungrateful swine I am. Remember what she has done for me. Faithful, true heart. God bless her. Yes, God in heaven bless her. . . ."

Then he thought of Ena Talbot. Dead, for ever gone. Ena, that thin snake, setting him on fire merely by contact with her smooth white arms as they wound about his neck —the dear harlot, full of tricks and turns, fighting and making it up—resisting him sometimes with all her strength, until he overcame her by brute force! Oh, those nights with Ena. . . . Battle, surrender, remorse, forgiveness —tears. Yes, they both of them wept sometimes Then the sleep of two people extenuated—a warm black pit into which they rolled headlong, still tight clasped, as though killing each other because they had made life too bitterly sweet, too cruelly strong.

He looked down at his hands. They were trembling. These memories had shaken him to his foundations. "In church, too," he said to himself. "Very reprehensible. Ought to be recalling prayers that I learned in innocent childhood," and he laughed inwardly. "Curse it all, I *must* pull myself together." . . . An anthem and high shrill voices stirred him. It was as if the piercing notes sounded in the top of his head. They seemed to break the evil spell and to set him free. "Gratitude. Yes, be grateful for much—as she is grateful for nothing, poor soul. Try to pay back. Never let her down again."

Margaret, entirely calmed by this peaceful hour, fortified, replenished in hope and confidence, came down the aisle with him and they walked slowly away from the church doors.

Presently she said she wanted him to have an evening's amusement if he could. He must join those friends of his. She insisted. "Yes, dear. Put me into a 'bus. Then you'll know I shan't tire myself."

"What, let you go back and have a beastly lonely supper? No, certainly not. We'll see things out together, old girl."

Then he gave way. But he would not allow her to go in an omnibus. She must have a taxi-cab. He put her into one, and stood watching it as it drove off.

That night he came home drunk. She heard him, after two o'clock, stumbling about. He knocked over a chair and mumbled some incoherent curses. He did not come into their bedroom, but slept on the sofa in the other room.

In the morning he was sullen. He said, "Well, out with it. Disgusted—eh?"

But she had prepared her attitude, and even her words. These contained no reproach.

"Not a bit disgusted. Why should I be? A little disappointed—but I dare say I ought not to be that either. It was sure to happen sooner or later. And of course after long abstinence a very little drink was sufficient to upset you."

"It wasn't," he said gloomily. "I had a lot of drink. I took my whack. So now you know. You can freely indulge in your despair."

"Andrew, don't be unkind. I don't in the least despair. How can you talk so absurdly? You're not going to pretend it wasn't an accident. You didn't do it on purpose."

"No."

"Very well. Probably this will help you. Listen, dear. You have the proof of how terribly careful you need to be. Take this as merely something that has put you on your guard. Then there's not the slightest reason why it should happen again."

"No, it shan't happen again." His manner had changed,

his voice had softened. "Margy, what a brick you are. Was there ever such a pal?" And he embraced her. "Let me put my hot face against your cool one"; and they sat motionless, cheek to cheek. "There, I am drawing virtue out of you. I can feel it. . . ."

On another Sunday, a fortnight later, she felt very tired, if not ill, and went to bed early. He had said that he might perhaps leave her in the evening. She heard him go down the stairs. But then he came up again and stood beside the bed.

"Sure you don't mind?"

She moved her shoulders and drew the bedclothes higher without answering him. Then he saw that she was in tears.

"Why, what's up? You don't like being left alone?"

"No," she said, "I'm quite all right. It's only weakness. I want you to go." She had struggled up into a sitting posture, and she flung her arms around his neck and kissed him. "But you *will* be careful, won't you?"

"Rather."

That night he did not return at all. He came back late in the afternoon of the next day, with a cock-and-bull story about a friend's motor-car that broke down twenty miles out of London and stranded them for the night. He did not seem to care whether she believed the tale or rejected it, and she made no pretence of believing. She spoke quietly and sadly.

"Don't let me have an alcoholist's child if you can help it."

The hopes or fears of Margaret as a mother were not to be realised. Two months later she had a miscarriage. She

was ill after it, and passed through a slow convalescence, with one or two troublesome relapses. Even after she was up and about it was some time before one could say that she had been restored to an ordinary state of health.

But at last she was fully recovered. The doctor certified her as quite well. With as much delicacy as explicit advice permitted, he said that marital relations could be resumed.

Her husband ignored this intimation, or at least did not modify his new habits because of it. During her illness he had taken a room at the top of the house, and he continued to sleep up there. After a time Margaret asked if he would not relinquish this extra accommodation, pointing out that it no longer seemed necessary, and that she would be glad to bring to an end the additional expense of it. He said he would think about giving up the room, but week after week he delayed doing so.

Poor as was their way of life, it cost much more than they could afford. She was now looking out for any chance of becoming an earner. Moreover, in order to lighten the landlord's weekly bill, she had made an arrangement by which she relieved the servant of nearly all household duties. She cleaned and swept, made the beds, and, wearing one of those big blue aprons that had been used at the Hampstead shop, with a handkerchief tied round her head to guard it from dust, she might well have been herself mistaken for an ordinary lodging-house drudge.

As far as she knew, Andrew was not making any effort to find employment. He grew angry if she ventured to speak of his empty days and the desirability of increasing their meagre resources. Quite little things made him angry, and he had ceased to express regret for outbreaks of bad temper or the sharp words that accompanied them. Once more he had sold some of his clothes; shabbiness descended on him; often he went unshaved for a couple of days; he neglected to get his hair cut.

In spite of her bitter distress, he still took her money.

She was powerless to keep it from him. He told her that she had got to "fork out." If she declared herself without a shilling at the moment, he told her to write a cheque.

"But, Andrew, there's no money in the bank either. I'm badly overdrawn."

"Oh, they'll give you tic. Come on. Let's have the cheque. They'll honour it all right. I'll take it there myself."

Once or twice Mr. Yardley had rescued her from heavy embarrassment. But for a Yardley windfall she could not have paid the doctor's bill. As he had done with regard to Andrew's affairs, Mr. Yardley from time to time announced that he had been able to save some odd amounts in the settlement of Margaret's obligations. He sent her these sums together with kindly sympathetic letters.

"I don't understand it," said Andrew grumblingly. "It seems to me rather fishy, the way he coughs up a few pounds and never gives us a plain account. Do you think the old devil did me down? I trusted him blind, you know."

This kind of querulous suspicion was a characteristic that he now displayed frequently. He suspected friends and acquaintances of playing him dirty tricks. He talked as if he felt that all men's hands were against him.

He had quarrelled with George Ryan, and abused him more strongly when Margaret defended him.

"I tell you," he said fiercely, "that the little blighter spoofed me. He knew I was down and out unless I got a last moment stroke of luck, and he deliberately shut me out of it. I told him what I thought of him, pretty straight too"; and Andrew laughed angrily. "Then, if you please, two days afterwards he had the damned effrontery to come grinning to shake hands and be friends. I told him to go to the devil."

"I think that was a pity."

"Well, you're welcome to your opinion—but keep it to yourself."

All this anger with George related not to the collapse of Bartolommeo shares, but to later developments. When the crash came George had not fled to West Australia, but, like the incurable gambler that he was, had made a last desperate throw. Somehow scraping together a small fund, he had recklessly speculated in another market; and what is commonly called the devil's luck had favoured him. During the last months, Andrew said, he had been making money hand over fist.

As she had recently asked Mr. Yardley to find her a job, however humble, she was not surprised when she saw his hand-writing on a large square envelope. It came by the mid-day post while Andrew was out. When she opened it she found that it contained nothing from Mr. Yardley, but another envelope with her name in a hand that she did not recognise.

It was a letter from George Ryan.

He said that not knowing where she lived he had taken the liberty of addressing her through the firm of solicitors that he had often heard her mention. He wanted news of her. He thought she might have written to him, and he begged her now to write telling him how she was, what she was doing, and everything else about herself. He said, too, that the difference with Andrew troubled him greatly, and he would be much pleased if by her kind offices it could be brought to an end. "*Write soon, dear Mrs. A., to your very real friend, George.*"

She replied to this letter guardedly but in a friendly tone, saying that she would be glad indeed to see the end of an unfortunate estrangement, although she feared that she was powerless to influence Andrew immediately. She was quite well, but had been rather ill some time ago. In conclusion she said she was sorry she could not invite George to come to the lodgings or propose a meeting anywhere else.

Next day Andrew was out again, and early in the afternoon she was putting on her hat with the intention of taking a stroll when she heard two or three taps on the sitting-room door. Coming out of the bedroom she found herself confronted by George Ryan.

"No one answered," he said apologetically, "so I forced an entry. Mrs. A.—my dear Mrs. A."; and he took both her hands and shook them warmly.

"I told you not to come, George."

"I know. But I wanted so terribly to see you. Forgive intrusive, tactless Georgey." He spoke with an affectation of gaiety, rather as if employing an old manner that was really no longer impulsive for the purpose of concealing the fact that he felt embarrassed; but then, as soon as he turned his brown eyes full upon her face, the genial careless air disappeared. He stared and began to stammer. "M-M-Margaret, how wretchedly ill you're looking. You said you were better, but you c-c-can't be—and look like this."

"Oh, I'm all right," she said brusquely, but forcing herself to smile. "In rude health. Putting on flesh. Getting fat."

"Yes, you're not thin. It isn't that"; and the commiseration in his friendly glance made her wince. "But honestly I would hardly have known you. Where's the snap and bounce, and the bright colour and the flashing eye?" Saying this, he obviously endeavoured to resume his usual sprightly facetiousness and, with no less obviousness, failed because of his sense of pity and regret. "Where's my lovely Mrs. A. gone to?"

"Oh, up the chimney," said Margaret, in a hard toneless voice. "That's a favourite expression of Andrew's. Everything goes up the chimney in the end. That's life. . . . Now, listen, George. I can't keep you because he might come back, and then there'd only be a row."

"Very good. But a few minutes! I must have a tiny talk with you."

"Then sit down and be quick about it."

She seated herself and pointed to the ugly black horsehair sofa. Before he began to talk she saw his eyes moving as if involuntarily. This made her wince again. He had taken in all that the room could tell him of wretchedness and failure.

The brief interview was painful to her. He paid no compliments, simple or exaggerated. She had no need to fear hand-graspings or other signs of a wish for anything more than quiet conversation; but he was very friendly, even affectionate, and when he timidly disclosed the real object of his visit he plunged her into distressing emotion.

He wanted her to take money. He offered it as a loan, but said he would rather that she should accept it as a gift. As a friend, he said, he might surely be permitted to help them, since it could not be disguised that they were hard up.

"Mrs. A., don't please say no. Man to man—as you once put it. I have plenty now, and goodness knows how long I shall. . . . Come. If only a hundred! But let it be two —no, three hundred. It'll perhaps get old Andrew on his legs again."

Then, pleading against her refusal, he spoke of his grief in having drawn them into dreadfully heavy losses. "I was the villain of the piece. It was all my fault about the San B."

"Don't blame yourself, George. If it hadn't been that, it would have been something else."

"Good of you to say so. . . . Of course, afterwards, I couldn't let Andrew go on, could I?"

"No, of course not. . . . Thank you for wanting to help —but I'm sure you understand it's impossible. . . . And time's up. Please go."

"Very good," and he took her hand in farewell. "Margaret, my dear, I'm so sorry for you."

"You needn't be. . . . Now—you mustn't upset me. . . . Good-bye. And please don't come here again—not ever."

She felt bound to tell Andrew of this visit, and he was less angry than she expected.

"Confound the fellow's impudence," he said fretfully. "Well, *I* don't want to see him."

"You won't."

"I don't know that. If he has come once, he'll come again."

"No, I asked him not to."

"So I have lost my looks," she said to herself. "George didn't spare me."

After long disuse she had again taken to a close study of all that her looking-glass could show her.

"I am ugly, repellent," she thought. "George couldn't even pump up allusions to a vanished charm"; and she laughed, although her throat was hot and dry, and mirth lay as remote from her as the stars. "He was sorry for me, but he didn't in the least care on his own account. After all, why should he? Why the devil should he? But Andrew! Andrew doesn't mind either."

Forlorn and miserable, she lifted the looking-glass from the top of the chest of drawers and put it on the seat of a chair. Then she knelt before it as if praying to it for mercy. She felt like someone kneeling at a funeral—the putting away in the grave of her own past self.

"No," she thought, "I wasn't like this—not at my very worst."

Never self-satisfied, always ready to doubt her possession of any ordinary attractiveness, she could not combat

the evidences of a plain and ill-favoured aspect that the glass seemed to be offering, much less belittle or refute them. She saw a pasty-faced, unhealthy-looking woman, with slack cheeks and dull, tired eyes. Her chin and neck seemed heavy, as if fattened by torpid habits and the lack of proper exercise. Her hair had an appearance of coarseness, as with the hair of common badly-nurtured people. It was quite devoid of lustre.

She stretched out her hand, seized a brush, and brushed her hair for three or four minutes with furious energy.

It was no use. She could not detect the slightest improvement. She put the glass back in its customary position and still peered into it, moving about in order to see, as well as her face, as much of her body as possible. The black frock that she was wearing looked old-fashioned, shabby, mean. And she seemed to have put it on badly. "So that's Mrs. A. up-to-date, *à l'heure actuelle*." A colourless dowdy, neglected person that one did not feel inclined to laugh at, but to cry over.

"But if I am like this, how can I wonder? How can I be surprised?"

Such thoughts remained with her, and Andrew did nothing to drive them away. Only he could rescue her from the terrible depression that they caused. Only he could rob the looking-glass of its torturing power and make it show a kinder picture.

She used to think, "If the physical side of his love goes, beyond recall, everything else will follow it. I shall become less and less to him, until I am nothing at all. Already the good-fellowship is wearing out. He no longer relies on me as he did; he has ceased to be open and frank when I make him talk; it is not only himself that he denies to me, but his wishes, intentions, wants. He keeps things secret, not because he fears my knowing them, but because even my sympathy is without value and my kindest and most carefully chosen words weary him when they do not annoy him.

Unless a change comes he will take his life back into his own hands completely, or reduce my share in it to so small a compass that he cannot be aware I am still there,"

And she thought with a jealous pang of Ena Talbot. "Ena held him that way. It can have only been that, with her." She was common, unintelligent, only able to talk of the gutter from which she had sprung, and yet during all those years she retained her absolute power over him. They quarrelled and made it up. An old thraldom, a constantly renewed enchantment, bound him to her. No matter what her failings, her shameful infidelities, her repeated wickedness, he could not throw her off, he could not do without her.

Little as he observed his wife he could not help noticing, on his return one evening, that there was something odd in Margaret's manner and her way of looking at him. She greeted him with almost exuberant cheerfulness; she laughed, and then asked him if he had been a good boy and kept out of mischief all the day. In a couple of sentences she used half a dozen slang words.

"What about supper?" he said, staring at her, and not in the least responding to her humour.

"Yes, what about it, Andrew? You touch the point at once;" and she was sprightly and arch, yet at the same time seeming nervous. The unnaturalness of it all struck him forcibly. "There isn't going to be any supper to-night."

"Why not?"

"You funny old thing, don't look so scared and glum. Now answer a question of mine. Do you know what to-day is?"

"Yes, Thursday. What then?"

"Would you be surprised if I said it was the anniversary of our wedding?"

"Is it?"

"Well, no, it isn't. But it's near the date—near enough to celebrate it"; and she laughed. "Take me out, and let's have a bust. I'll stand you treat. Mr. Yardley has weighed in again. Now, what price a modest beano?"

He agreed grudgingly, and still watched her as if altogether puzzled by her.

"Splendid," she cried, joyously. "Give me half an hour to smarten up. Kill the time with your silly old cross-word. I'll be ready in a bare thirty minutes."

Then she went into the other room and set to work.

She, too, had secrets now. She, too, had been spending money recklessly. To achieve an end she had not counted any cost in the means. Bringing out her hidden stores, she spread them round her on bed and chair and floor—a new red frock, undergarments that included the latest and best type of corset belt, expensive stockings and shoes, a close-fitting black hat with a small ornament of paste diamonds attached to the front of it. These formed her armoury of weapons, carefully collected and as yet untested.

Quickly but without hurrying she dressed, scented herself, powdered and painted herself. It was all finished within the half hour. As she scrutinised the effect in the glass, her face was as hard as stone beneath the powder and the paint.

Then, with her gloves in one hand, and a long scarf trailing from the other, she marched into the living-room.

"I'm ready, old man, if you are."

He looked up from his newspaper and uttered an exclamation. His amazement was so great that for a little while he could not find any coherent words. He sat staring at her, following her gestures with intent eyes as she smoothed the lower part of her frock and arranged the scarf round her neck.

"Hullo—hullo," and he got up. "What the deuce have

you done to yourself? I never. . . . In all my life I never saw such a transformation."

"Only some new props," she said negligently. "And about time, eh? You'll admit I needed refitting. . . . Come on. Get your hat."

She took him to a small Italian restaurant near Westbourne Grove—a humble place, but, after their lodgings, appearing grand, with its red velvet seats, big mirrors, gilded panels, and crystal lamps. The food was sufficiently good. She had ordered their dinner during the afternoon.

"Have some wine," she said.

But he said he did not want any.

"Just a little—just for once—because it's an occasion."

"No," he said. "I don't care for it. I'm quite off all that. For nearly a month it has meant nothing to me."

"Delighted to hear you say so. . . . This is like old times, isn't it? How long, I wonder, since you and I had a treat together."

She continued to be very gay, but talking more naturally now, and only becoming artificial and unlike herself when he was silent. Often he seemed not to hear what she was saying. But while she felt that his thoughts had wandered far away, he still seemed to watch her. Once it gave her a very uncomfortable sensation, this mingling of inattentiveness and close examination; and soon he began to smile, not at her but at something that his unspoken thoughts had suggested.

"Wake up," she said, pulling his sleeve. "I'm talking to you."

"I beg your pardon," he said apologetically, but with a startled confused air.

"You were looking at me as though you'd forgotten who I was, or you mistook me for somebody else"; and she forced a laugh. "Don't look at me like that. It makes me shy."

They sat for a long time after dinner, while she smoked

many cigarettes and still tried to maintain an animated conversation. But his own thoughts again occupied him. He was more and more silent.

"Call the waiter," she said abruptly, "and tell him to bring the bill."

As they strolled away from the restaurant he linked his arm in hers and pressed it gently. She laughed and returned the pressure.

"Andrew, take me somewhere. Music-hall, Palais de dance, I don't mind what. Not a cinema. I know you hate them."

"Oh, it's too late."

"Nonsense," she said gaily. "The night is young. Let's have some fun while we're about it."

"No," he said. "Let's go home. . . . Yes, I want to get home!"

He hailed a passing taxi-cab and helped her into it. Then, in the darkness of the cab, directly they were moving, he enveloped her in a close embrace.

"Maggs, you darling—you angel—you little devil. Naughty girl, what d'you mean by it? You look so nice, you smell so nice, that you've quite knocked me off my balance."

"Andrew, take care of my hat."

"Damn your hat. It's *you* I want."

He crushed her against him, pushing her head back till his lips reached her mouth and took possession of it. Then he almost stifled her with an unending kiss.

The bad time was beginning.

She had won him back; but her unhappiness was far

greater than before, because active fear had now entered into what had been only a forlorn misery. She had longed for his caresses, and now she dreaded them. She seemed to have awakened something new and strange in him. He displayed an intermittent passion that was like love and yet not love. She had known his ardours, gently consuming flames that burned her but did not injure her, that brought at once both ecstasy and repose. But they were utterly, sublimely different from these spasms of fierce desire. No longer the Andrew she had loved and trusted, he seemed a stranger forcing her to compliance. At first meek and submissive, she pleaded soon for peace.

If he allowed her a respite it was a brief one. She trembled in apprehension when she saw that it was about to end. Quickly she had learned to read the new changes of his face. Of an evening when he looked at her in a certain way she could not meet his eyes. She dropped her head, pretending to be suddenly busy with something, and growing hot and cold, weak and nerveless; or she would get up and move about the room hurriedly tidying it. Then perhaps he came very softly behind her, imprisoned her in his arms, and murmured words of endearment that he never till now had used, words that she had never heard or seen in all her life. He would not let her escape, he would not let her turn round, he held her with her back towards him. The sensations evoked by his hot lips kissing her neck and his bristly chin rubbing against her cheek were almost if not quite unbearable. She wanted to scream, to faint, to be sick. But oblivious or cruelly regardless of her feelings, he would hold her fast until in the murmur of his husky voice there came entreaties, invitations, requests that were really commands, and he temporarily released her.

She used to think when alone during the evening hours, but waiting with dread for his return, "If I can't stop it he will make me loathe him. If he goes on he will drive me mad."

But he went on.

Horror and repulsion! Memories that she would have believed dead, so completely had she lost them, rose to the surface of her thoughts and did not sink again. He had said that sooner or later all women turned against him. His very words sounded themselves. "Then I can't help it. I pay them out." And she thought piteously, "But why should he pay *me* out? What have I ever done to deserve it?" Some part of this new phase she could understand, and involuntarily she thought of terms so ugly that by habit women such as she treat them as no less non-existent than the attributes that they represent. Lasciviousness, lust, appetite. Yes, appetite. He had a craving and he gave way to it, as he had given way to that other one, the recurrent need for strong drink. But this was worse, more brutal, more disgusting. He satisfied it, but not alone. If a starving man breaks into a house, seizes food, and makes a ravenous meal, he leaves the people of the house untouched. He has robbed them, but he has not soiled and degraded them. But this necessity involved the defilement of another.

She understood much, and yet there were things that she could not understand. Beyond the destruction of her physical comfort and her peace of mind, she seemed to feel that there was a worse menace. She seemed to be assailed by the anguish of mystery as well as by the increasing torments of reality. Doubts, inexplicably strong, since they were still vague and offered no foundations in solid fact, seemed to throw her into a grievous trouble that concerned not both of them, but only herself. "What is it?" she thought. "Why do I suddenly fear an unknown danger?" Mysterious, inexplicable, deadly. She passed from apprehension to a state of unreasoning fear. She was afraid, afraid, afraid.

This sort of access of cold dumb terror was suffered only during his absence, never when he was visibly, palpably present. Then the fear was warm and alive, driving her

heart, strangling her breath, but not freezing her blood. Yet even then the attribute of mystery was not wholly banished. Something fantastic, terrible, impossibly cruel, was threatening her.

Then one day in the moment of waking, and while the weight of sleep still lay on her eyelids and the distress of dreams still ached in her brain, she had a thought that was like an illumination. For some moments it seemed to shoot bright rays through all that had been impenetrable. She seemed to be suddenly armed with full knowledge. In this bright light of intuition or unconscious mental effort she seemed to see clearly the cause and reason of all that had happened, together with a certainty of all that was soon to happen. Then the knowledge went. The opening of her eyes, the sight of the familiar room, the ordinary sensations of life, had obliterated everything. It had been like a message from the night to the day, and the day would not listen to it or at least would not patiently hear it out.

All that morning, however, she seemed able to think with greater lucidity than had been possible to her of late. She thought, "Unless he stops he will ruin our lives irrevocably. He has changed and he will change me too." And she thought, "But already he is doing it." Just as she felt that he was different, not the real Andrew, he made her feel that she was not her real self. For him the past that they had shared in common seemed to be wiped out. He forgot the experiences, adventures, happiness, and griefs that had linked them one to another. He forgot or he refused to remember. He had attacked her very identity; if he shook it further she would scarcely know who she was. She would be nobody. When one loses one's past and has no future, but merely exists in the present, one *is* nothing.

He dealt with her as if he had only recently found her—a lucky find, an easy characterless mistress, a piece of plastic material that he could mould and complete to his

fancy. He had ceased to call her by her name. She was not Maggs or Margy, but his little cat—his vixen—his naughty girl. These epithets had further sickened her. But she thought now that they were more than stupid, vulgar, unworthy, they had a sinister meaning, a cruel purpose. They matched with everything else. He was trying to pull her down to a lower level; and she felt that unless she summoned adequate courage and fought for freedom he would succeed. Trampling on her pride, tearing away all delicacies and refinements, laughing at reticence and decency, he would reduce her to the condition of a vile, dishonoured slave. And, most terrible thought of all, she might end by being a willing slave. She would be brave and fight. But her courage had gone. She could only fear.

She believed he had spoken the truth when he told her at the restaurant that he did not wish for wine and that he was not taking alcoholic stimulant of any kind. For throughout this time he had no outbreak. He remained dangerously sober. Sometimes when he was out late in the evening she hoped that he was drinking. She thought, "If he comes home intoxicated, I am safe." The later he was the stronger grew the hope.

She went to bed and listened for his footstep.

She lay quaking in the bed as he went upstairs. Sometimes he opened the door, and with no more light than came from the landing, stood looking at her. Ice-cold, quailing, she lay silent and pretended to be sleeping.

"Good-night," he said. "Not asleep, are you?"

"No—but you woke me."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes—but dreadfully tired."

He went up to his own room, and she breathed again. But she thought, "He may come down after a little while."

She wanted to spring out of bed and lock the door, but dared not.

Hours passed before she fell asleep, and then it was only to dream. That symbolic dream of her early love, forgotten till now, returned to her. It was in her sleep, vague, tormenting, and as yet unrecognisable. In the morning she felt more tired than she had been overnight. She was exhausted, worn out, and she said to herself, "I had the same nightmare. What is it?"

It became clear at last, cruelly vivid; but it had changed. Invented by herself, an instinctive creation to embody the thoughts and passions of that period of her life and revealing a desire that she dared not avow, it had been so deeply printed in her brain that any change of its often repeated pictures might well seem impossible; and yet mysteriously alterations, modifications, adaptations, had been wrought to make its import suit the present hour and render its oppression more horrible. As a day-dream it had sometimes mastered her in spite of all her strength of resistance; as a night-dream it was quite uncontrollable, ruling her absolutely. As a wild fantasy it had appalled her; as a semblance of reality it shattered her. Night after night it did its destructive work.

Parts of the wood were in the sunlight, others in dark shadow. She was there, naked, defenceless, and she knew that somewhere near lurked the human satyr, the merciless man-beast. But instead of wanting to be seen she desperately tried to hide herself. Once she had pursued him, now he was the pursuer. He had seen her. She must fly, although she knew she would not escape. He cried to her to stop. He shouted a name after her, not her own name, and she ran faster, her heart bursting, her face and limbs torn and bleeding, as she sprang through the brambles, screaming for aid, mad with fear. She knew that when he caught her the sunlight would vanish. He would drag her down into a dark abyss of horror and despair.

She had told him several times that she was ill, and now it had become true. Her nerves had given way. She had fits of hysterical weeping.

He seemed anxious and worried, if not really sympathetic; and when she implored him to allow her to be quiet and to give her a chance of recovering herself, he consented without the slightest apparent hesitation. He said she might rest as much and as long as she pleased. Certainly he would not molest her.

A week passed. She slept without dreaming now. Perhaps her locked door gave a sense of security that made deep sleep possible for her. Then one night she woke suddenly, as if something had disturbed or startled her. She had a feeling that the night was half over, but she did not know what the hour really was, or what it was that had roused her. She only knew that she was again afraid. She lay in the black darkness listening.

Presently she heard sounds in the other room. Andrew was moving about in there. He had not turned on the light, for not a gleam came from beneath the door, and because it was dark he bumped against the table and then against some other pieces of furniture. He did not stumble or knock anything over; but she soon understood that he had been drinking, although not sufficiently so to stupefy him. He talked to himself, and his voice sounded thick. Then he sang in a soft undertone. Two or three times he laughed.

All at once he tried the handle of her door, and shook it violently when he discovered that the door was locked. Then he ordered her to open it. She kept silent.

"Do you hear me?" he said more loudly. "Unlock the door."

Then she spoke to him.

"You promised to leave me alone. Andrew, don't be cruel."

But he shouted to her. He was raging on the other side of the door. His voice, raised in brutal wrath, seemed to fill the house Then with an oath he threatened to smash the door, and he hit its upper part twice with his fist. Terrified, she scrambled out of bed, switched on the light, and let him come in.

Instantly he seized her by the arm, and she struggled to release herself.

"Andrew, for pity's sake."

"All right, my pretty one. Fight if you please, but it won't put me off. Fight me. Claw, scratch, bite as if you were a wild cat. I like it."

He held her with one hand; and she saw the other, its knuckles reddened, swollen, a trickle of blood coming from them, as he re-locked the door. Next moment he had turned out the light. Darkness, horror, the dream!

That night the cruel ordeal ended. The outrage was never repeated. Late in the day after it, when she dressed and went into the sitting-room, she found a letter that he had written to her.

Curtly, without any expression of regret, he told her that he had been "out of sorts" lately, upset by many things, and not able to avoid annoying anybody who happened to be within reach, and he concluded with a coarse but very explicit statement to the effect that she at least would henceforth be exempt from annoyance.

He came back in the evening, but went straight upstairs to his room, and another twenty-four hours had passed

before she saw him. She had made up her mind what she would say, but as soon as she began he stopped her.

"That's enough. You got my note, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then shut up."

He spoke roughly, but she did not mind. Indeed the roughness cheered her, because it seemed a confirmation of his written message. She began to believe that he would keep faith, and every day the belief strengthened.

Then fear left her; for she saw that he was himself again. All that had been strange, abnormal, ominous of evil, was so completely gone that, but for bitter experience, she might have thought it to have been only an unhealthy imagination of her own. He was Andrew, the intimately well-known companion, and not the stranger who, with menacing glances, unfamiliar words, and repugnant gestures, had desperately frightened her. He might bully her and sneer at her, but he was still her man, the man for whom she had contentedly suffered and bravely hoped. He might break her heart yet, but he would not send her to a lunatic asylum.

Gradually she was able to think of him with almost the old softness. She felt that he was ashamed; she knew that he was unhappy. A cloud of sombre regrets or sorrows hung over him continuously. Although brutal of tone, with furious and irritable movements if she attempted to talk or in any way disturbed his meditations, she saw the look on his face once that in the long gone past had seemed so pathetically appealing. Quite unconscious that he was being observed, he sat by the window with the last of a long day's sunlight on his head and shoulders. She, standing in the doorway of her room, watched him and felt her old tenderness returning. He was like a wistful child, like a child mourning, a child just old enough to understand that the treasure it has lost can never be recovered.

If he had turned towards her, above all if he had uttered

a word that was not stern and repressive, she would have said, "Andrew, we can't go on like this. We mustn't quarrel. We *must* be friends."

He would not permit of any oral communication between them; and this being so she thought after a time that she would write a letter to him. He had written to her! She wanted to say extraordinarily difficult things. But she found that they were quite impossible to write. Then, thinking of how she would say them if he gave her a chance, she realised that they could not be said any more than written.

It was the hottest weather of the year. With the window always wide open their room was airless. Yet he scarcely ever left the house. He sat by the window moody and silent. When she was there he ignored her presence. If she compelled him to speak to her he was rude and contemptuous. Even when addressing her, he did not look at her. A servant or a dog would have merited an attention more polite.

Once she advised him to go out.

"No," he said. "Mind your own business."

"But isn't it my business, when I see you stopping indoors all day, never getting any fresh air, any exercise?"

"Go out yourself. Anyhow, get out of this room. Do you hear? Get out."

He had not raised his eyes. She went softly into her room, closed the door, and sat upon the bed crying.

Then the cloud lifted. The long phase of heavy gloom ended. It was at dusk. The sun had sunk behind the ugly houses of the street; the room was full of shadow; she stood again in the doorway, and he sat at his accustomed place at the window. But he was looking at her. Instinctively, although she could not see the expression of his face, she understood. When she heard his voice she made a quick step forward and then stopped, waiting breathlessly. He had only uttered her name.

"Margaret"; and he repeated the name, gently, pleadingly. "I am sorry I put you through it like that. Can you forgive me?"

"Yes, I forgive you, but——"

"I know what you are going to say. You needn't say it. It will never happen again. . . . Come here."

She went and knelt by him.

"Do you hate me?"

"No," and she said she could never hate him if she tried; she would always love him if he would let her. "But be kind to me. Be fair. Don't punish me for what Ena did to you."

"It wasn't only Ena. I told you so. It was all of them—one woman after another—every woman."

"Except me."

"No, you too."

"I won't show it again. Andrew, I swear I won't *feel* it again, if only you'll be kind;" and she spoke rapidly, hurrying out the words. "It wasn't what you think—it was nothing really, compared with what you mean. And listen. I was partly to blame. I started the—the upset. You said I had put you off your balance And after that. . . . My nerves had gone. I was ill. I wasn't myself—you weren't yourself."

"Poor girl;" and very gently he stroked her hair, sweeping it back from her forehead. "Poor girl."

"Andrew!"

"Why did you care for me? Why were you foolish enough ever to take up with me? You had warning. I was fair then. I warned you. But you would do it."

"If it was all over again, I would still do it."

"FROM all you have told me, it seems that your husband used to be a drunkard and now he is a dipsomaniac."

It was twelve months later. Margaret had come in the evening to the house of the doctor who had attended her during her illness. She had waited for a long time with other humble patients, before being taken into his consulting-room. At first inattentive, he now appeared to be interested.

"Dipsomaniac?" She repeated the ugly-sounding word. "But that's much worse, isn't it?"

"No, I wouldn't say so. Not in such a case as this, if I understand it. There is, of course, a great difference"; and the doctor gave her an explanation. The ordinary alcoholic patient is a tippler; he is always drinking, he goes on and on. But in dipsomania there are intervals, sometimes long, in which the patient remains completely sober; he has no wish for alcohol; he may even feel a distaste for it, a horror of it. Then, however, the craving returns with such force that it is irresistible. In spite of himself he plunges into an excess of drinking. It is a sort of paroxysm. Then when the drunken bout is over he is quiet again. "Is that the way with your husband? Check me if I am wrong."

She said that the description tallied exactly with what she believed to occur. "And he *does* fight against it—or he did. He has said he did."

"Just so. If it was a severe bout he would probably feel remorse after it, and would make promises quite sincerely. But then after another quiet period the craving would begin again, and the same crisis would be repeated."

"Yes. . . . Can one do anything to prevent it?"

"Well, there are always premonitory symptoms"; and the doctor spoke of restlessness, irritability, depression. He

said that sometimes a patient's whole character and disposition would be altered in this stage.

"Yes," she said. "That's it exactly."

"The restless behaviour is an invariable symptom. Have you observed that in your husband's case the restlessness leads directly to the breakdown?"

"Yes—but not always. It sometimes begins after a quarrel. We quarrel a great deal."

"But that doesn't do any good."

"No, it does a lot of harm."

"Can't you avoid it?"

"No, I can't. I lose my temper. We—well, we argue, and he makes me so angry that I can't hold myself in."

"Is the subject of dispute his bad habit?"

She shook her head, and before speaking rose from her chair. "No. Quite different. Private matters."

"I see." The doctor had become sympathetic, and very friendly in manner. "Don't hurry away, Mrs. Lane. . . . Please sit down. If I could, I would like to advise you to the best of my ability. But I don't want to be intrusive." Then he asked for a few words about the actual condition of affairs when she and her husband came together. "Anything more that you care to say?"

Margaret had resumed her seat; she seemed to hesitate.

"His—his first wife had drunk herself to death." Margaret said this falteringly. Then she went on with sudden heat and strength. "She was a hateful creature—an utterly abandoned wretch."

"I see. And no doubt he would have drunk himself to death, too, if you had not interfered. . . . Honestly, Mrs. Lane, I think you have effected a great deal"; and the doctor was cordial. "Yes, a great deal. . . . Now, as to the future. There is of course only one treatment—total abstinence. No half-measures can pay. But occupation, cheerful company! Are you with him mostly?"

She said that she had to leave him all day when she was

working. Just now she was out of a job. Until recently she had been daily caretaker of some flats. She kept them clean and showed people over them. The job ended when the last of the flats were let.

"You did your work too conscientiously. You should have managed to spin it out like most caretakers do."

"Yes," she said, with a pallid smile. "I ought to have pretended there were ghosts or rats or bad drains."

"Does your husband leave it altogether to you to keep the home fires burning? Doesn't he ever try to earn an honest penny?"

"Yes, but it's no use. He loses his job directly. There's always trouble." And in reply to a further question she said that six months ago he was driving a lorry. The trouble then was because of a fight in the garage yard. He knocked a man down.

"*I* see."

She had risen to go and the doctor was standing too.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Lane. You mustn't lose heart. You are travelling a hard road, but honestly I see no reason why you should not yet succeed. . . . No, don't bring out your purse. There's no fee—at any rate for this visit. I am very glad to have seen you." Then in the act of shaking hands he spoke sharply: "What have you done to your face? The cheek-bone?"

"Oh, that's nothing," she said hurriedly, and she turned her head away. "I hurt it—a week ago."

"How?"

"At a cupboard—reaching up—and something fell."

"Oh, just an accident," said the doctor, in a subdued tone, and no longer looking at her. "Good-bye—and better luck. You deserve it."

She went home by 'bus and tram to Shepherd's Bush, and all the way she was thinking. She had effected something.

The doctor said she had effected a great deal, saying it as if he meant it, and not merely from kindness. He was kind, that doctor—with such quick eyes. She wished he hadn't noticed what he did at the end.

No need to lose heart. While there's life there's hope. As she sat tightly pressed on either side in the crowded tram-car, with a couple of workmen standing so close in front of her that she had to lean back to avoid being touched by their toil-stained garments, she was drawing again on her almost inexhaustible funds of courage and unselfishness. Her courage had been marvellously maintained in this last year. For they had sunk very low. It had been a collapse rather than a descent, and they were down, both of them. He had pulled her down with him, not into that black abyss of her dream, but into a kind of daylight darkness made by the clouds of want, difficulty, sordid endeavours, and humiliating disappointments that hung above them in their poverty.

She could have borne it and have struggled to rise again even more bravely than she had done, if only he could have spared her the torment that inflamed her mind with scarcely any remission. The seeds of fire seemed ineradicable. The flames that grew from them burnt up her energy, strength, tenacity of purpose, will-power. They devoured everything inside her except blind anger.

He had made this new misery for her not through her fear, but her jealousy. She had a rival that she could not defeat; a hated, loathed claimant to his thoughts and his desires; an insidious deadly enemy that she could not even reach, much less battle with openly for supremacy.

Miserable days, one after another, leading nowhere unless to more pain. Yet always there seemed to come some gleam of light, some flicker of hope, to prevent her from despairing. It had come to-day in the doctor's words about the future. Not altogether dark! Andrew himself, too, from time to time, if only for a moment or so, warmed her heart

and kept hope alive in it. He carried parcels for her, followed her into the street bringing an umbrella or a waterproof if he thought she might be caught by rain; in the presence of other people he was respectful to her. A gentleman still, although a fallen one! Notwithstanding their quarrels he did small acts of kindness to her, and sometimes for her sake to others. Even after his utmost brutalness he would show some redeeming quality.

For instance, one evening in the Uxbridge Road when they were walking home together a man pestered them to buy a large bundle of roses. A feeble half-starved creature, he limped after them with his whining song—"Kind lady, buy a rose. Not a bite have I had to-day. Lovely fine roses. Spare a sixpence, sir. Only a tanner for three fine roses," and so on—until Andrew, fierce and strong and overpowering, issued his customary order, telling the man to go to the devil, unless he wanted to be kicked or given in charge for begging. The man limped away; and Andrew and Margaret walked on. She did not speak. She could not. After a while Andrew asked her why she was so glum and sulky. She told him that the piteous flower-seller was in her mind. She had felt sorry for him and was on the point of giving him some coppers when Andrew interposed. Surely there had been no need to treat such a poor wretch so roughly?

The sulkiness seemed to be on Andrew's side then. He would not answer her or speak to her, and near their house he abruptly left her.

When he came home about forty minutes later he was hot and red of face. He had been running. He had gone back to find the lame flower-seller and had bought all his stock.

"There are your roses," he said, pushing the bundle into Margaret's hands. "I gave him a sovereign and said it was from you. Now are you satisfied?" And he mopped his damp forehead and laughed. "For a dot-and-go-one that

old chap can leg it. He was halfway back to the Marble Arch before I overtook him."

Margaret was touched. Reckless extravagance, great nobility; a splendid, generous action performed through tenderness for her! She thanked him effusively. But then in the very beginning of her full glow of pleasure he spoilt everything by an allusion to the object of her anger and hatred.

The more humble part of the Westbourne Park neighbourhood may be hideous, but Shepherd's Bush at its poorest has an abject forlornness that is unsurpassed anywhere else in London. The Lanes lived at the top of a house above a grocer's shop. They had two bedrooms only, no sitting-room. Such meals as they shared together were taken in Margaret's room, which she kept as decent as she could. Here, and in the untidiness and confusion of Andrew's room, they quarrelled, raged, and made it up, only to quarrel again.

Margaret lit the gas in her room and, before pulling down the window blind, looked out.

There were no shops on the other side of the road. From end to end it had nothing but sordid little dwelling-houses, all alike, all hateful to look at. The occupant of the house opposite was an oldish woman with two slatternly daughters, seamstresses, who worked in an upper room and were almost incessantly visible. A son, employed at some factory, came home of an evening and often brought men friends, who played with his sisters and were perhaps their lovers. These people watched the Lanes, talked about them, and, as Margaret surmised, looked down upon them. But, indeed, as she knew well, she and Andrew were a subject of contemptuous interest for all their neighbours.

They were the disreputable man and the woman who lived with him, not perhaps his wife, but his habitual mate. Their affairs were discussed down below in the grocer's shop, which was a sort of informal club, a meeting-place for gossip and amusing debate, as well as a depot of supply. Down there one customer would grinningly tell another fresh facts about them, and launch into conjectures as to their past history. Truth or invention. Anything was acceptable to these humble scandalmongers. The Lanes had been turned out of their last lodgings, and if they weren't precious careful they would get the boot here. The grocer himself said he was fed up with them. At any minute he might complain to the landlord. Two nights ago they had made a horrid shindy.

Margaret laughed defiantly as she stood at her window. Across the way none of the blinds were down. She could look right into the gas-lit rooms, and she saw that one of the girls was watching as usual. The old mother came, too, and was motionless by the daughter's shoulder, peering forth with inquisitive expectancy.

"Damn them," said Margaret; and she stared at the house opposite, exactly as Ena Talbot had stared at the refined home of her critics across Downside Avenue. "Damn them all." She used oaths nowadays. Andrew had taught her the trick. Or it had been forced upon her as a necessary adjunct to recriminations, the language to which he had once been accustomed on the lips of a companion, the enhancement and strengthening of abuse without which the sharpest words may fall a little flat. "Damn and damn them."

In truth it was a hideous travesty of the Westmouth scandal. Once more Mr. Lane and his lady had incurred the disapprobation of an entire neighbourhood. Again his reprehensible behaviour formed a universal topic of condemnatory chatter. For the second time he and the woman who lived with him were a cause for regret among

the righteous, contempt with the hard-hearted, and perhaps a faint mirthful pity in moralists not themselves altogether blameless. With Margaret Dacre at his side, he had achieved on this immeasurably lower scale all that he had done in the midst of prosperous high-toned society, with the yellow-haired flaunting Ena Talbot to assist him. Here at Shepherd's Bush, the unspeakably mean, poor, dejected suburb, he was as completely a pariah as he had been in the fashionable, attractive, proudly managed seaside resort called Westmouth.

Margaret had recognised it all too clearly. In essentials their life now was the same as that of the older combination—the same or worse. This, then, was the culmination of her effort; a firmly and even a nobly sustained effort, as in her thoughts she must without self-praise or vainglory feel that it had been. Almost absurd, bringing harsh laughter in the midst of hot tears, fantastically improbable, beyond the scope of wildest prediction, the wheel of time, moving at first slowly and then very fast, had brought them back to the point where Andrew stood before she attempted his reformation. Going down and still down, they had sunk to the cat-and-dog existence led by him and that other one, nagging, snarling, fighting, trying to tear themselves to pieces.

And the intolerable bitterness lay in the certainty, gradually invading and filling her mind, that he cared nothing for the degradation, the shame, the bankruptcy of all their hopes, and only regretted the companion of those evil days of the past which those of the present were reproducing. He remembered her and did not try to forget her. He craved for her; he yearned for her with a base and morbid intensity.

Disgustingly cruel, unforgivably insulting—the insult of it set her on fire, its ingratitude nearly broke her heart.

He had repeated his order forbidding her to speak of

Ena, but she disobeyed him and laughed in scorn at his wrath.

"Why shouldn't I speak of her? You speak of her yourself."

"No, I don't."

"Oh, yes, you do—twice yesterday, and once the day before. Besides, whether you're speaking of her or not, you're always thinking of her. You can't deny it."

This was at first, when the trouble was young. They had soon got far beyond that stage. To make covert or open reference to his old love now had become a habit with him. Often the name seemed to come to his lips of its own accord. He uttered it involuntarily. Sometimes it sounded like the distorted echo of another word, as if he had intended to say something else and had unexpectedly failed. Like vapour on a damp stagnant pool, it rose from the depths of his brooding thought. Like the inadvertent evidence of a dominant idea, it crept with its tell-tale irrelevancy into the plain context of ordinary life. Thus he did not in general seem conscious now of the torture he was inflicting on Margaret.

Once, when her own thought was quite undisturbed, quite free from its usual suspicious anxiety, she asked him why had he smiled. What was he thinking about? Wouldn't he let her into the joke?

"Yes," he said meditatively. "Let me see. . . . Oh, yes. Couldn't you have your hair shorter at the back? I don't mean the sides or on top. But quite close on your neck. It would look jollier. . . . Ena had it like that. It suited her. . . . Try it."

"No, I think not"; and Margaret managed to curb herself and to speak quietly, as if giving a natural and courteous answer. "I disagree with you as to its suiting me. You see, I'm not a tart, and I don't want to be mistaken for one."

That was his way now, to give her the sting when she

least expected it. Then of course it hurt most. The abominable surprise necessarily increased its power to cause pain.

On that night when he brought her the mendicant's flowers, he stood by, smiling and contented, while she put them into the jug on her washing-stand. Presently she would borrow a vase for them. She said they were lovely roses, not overblown, with a delicious perfume. She thanked him again and again. He, watching her, appeared to be well satisfied both by her thanks and her praise of the pretty red roses. His eyes followed complacently the gentle and delicate movements of her hands as she slowly arranged the whole bouquet, putting each flower into its place, making it comfortable, with its head supported and its long stalk safe in the water.

After a time he laughed softly.

"How busy you are, aren't you?" And he went on as if merely talking to himself. "I suppose all women like flowers. . . . Ena did. I have seen her dabbing about with them precisely like that—on and on—never finished."

Margaret's hands ceased working. She stood up, looking at him, and beginning to breathe fast. Suddenly she snatched the flowers out of the jug, hurried with them to the end of the passage, and threw them into the household sink.

Then she came back and taunted him. She could not prevent herself. Her breast was swelling; she felt she would suffocate unless she somehow relieved the internal pressure.

"Do tell me. Did Ena really love flowers? Tell me some more about her—I mean, the things for which you most valued her. She boozed with you of course. That was nice. But I knew that. What else? I expect her funny way of talking amused you. Did she drop her aitches—or just put them on? 'Handrew?' Perhaps she did both. 'Handrew, 'oo did you take yer 'at off to in the 'Igh Street? . . . Not

that girl I 'ate—that 'aughty Miss Dacre at the 'ouse hopposite?'"

When for a moment she stopped railing at him, her upper lip was retracted in an ugly grimace that showed her teeth; she gasped for breath; she pressed a hand against her chest. Then she laughed and went on again.

He shouted at her. He looked murderous. But she was never afraid of him now. Anger obliterated all sense of fear.

If the wrangle was in his room he turned her out of it. If he followed her into her room, still threatening her, she in her turn ordered him to clear out. As he withdrew she began again.

"Even Ena had a room to herself. Ena, who was public property before you picked her up, was allowed *some* privacy."

"Will you be quiet?"

"No, I won't—I won't"; and she banged the door in his face.

The dead woman had come between them.

She was always there; a presence invisible, yet as real as that of any living person, and more powerful a thousandfold in the capacity of doing harm. Her shrill laughter, unheard but sounding on the mental ear, mocked them. The stale odour of her perfumes tainted the air they breathed. Her skinny red-nailed hands were pushing them further and further apart. She would separate them irrevocably unless her ghost could be laid.

Had she too once suffered the destructive, annihilating pains of jealousy? Had she ever really loved? Not Andrew, but some early lover who had betrayed and forsaken her. Or was the malignant haunting of her last protector, the

man in whose house she had died, only a means to an end? Through Andrew she could reach the heart she wished to wring. Andrew was the weapon she used and not the reason of her pitiless attack on an enemy whom she had detested in life and could not pardon after all these years of death. A tardy but inexorable vengeance. Tit for tat. Getting quits at last with the stuck-up young lady who had set a whole town against her?

It did not matter how or with what purpose. She had come back from the grave. She was here, and she remained here. Margaret could no more escape her influence than Andrew could banish the memories she aroused. Thinking of her, recalling all she had been told about her, all she had ever observed or conjectured, Margaret felt sometimes that she herself was growing mentally not unlike the living Ena. Sometimes she seemed to be *imitating* her. She had gestures, bodily movements, that were not her own. Her anger itself, as well as the method of expressing it, was often like that of a common uneducated person. She talked sneeringly, just as Ena might have talked. In the height of a quarrel she said the things that she believed the other would have said. The very tone of her voice was warped and strained to the echo of the other voice.

Nothing mattered except this one thing. Andrew perhaps was unfaithful now in acts; but it was only the infidelity of thought that tortured Margaret. Nothing else counted. If he left her for a night she knew that he did not find what he was seeking. Indeed she believed he went with women now; but that seemed of no consequence to her. It was this other, the woman he could not go with, this shadow, this ghost, this implacable, lifeless intruder, who alone had power to make her writhe in humiliation as a defeated rival. Only Ena could change the blood in her veins to fire, and poison each new thought more virulently than the infected thought that it followed. Only the dead Ena could make her life more cruel than death.

Sometimes she wept in the climax of her rage. Half-hysterical, she laughed and sobbed, brandished her arms, twisted her hands. She moaned and wailed. Then, piteous, pleading, she clung to him, begging him to be kind again, praying him to remember that he owed her something.

"What did Ena do for you that I haven't—and a hundred times more? When have I ever failed you?"

"Yes, I know. Don't worry"; and he tried to laugh. "Comparisons are odious. You and Ena are two different people."

"Are we?" she said plaintively, miserably. "Sometimes I am not sure that we *are* two people. . . . No, this isn't the first time—not by a long chalk—that you've made me feel I'm not anybody at all"; and her voice became hard, with a touch of shrillness in it. Anger was returning. "You'd like it—wouldn't you?—if Ena did a reincarnation in *me*. That would be jolly for you. Perhaps that's what you've been trying for—to drive the soul out of me, and then Ena's soul, *darling*, sweet Ena's heavenly soul, could take its place."

"Oh, stop it. How any sane person can be such a fool . . ."

"Not such a fool as you think. Oh, I can see through you like glass—like dirty glass breathed on by your Ena. . . ."

And the new quarrel was in full swing. They raised their voices. Neighbours were forgotten. The window blind might be up or down. The door to the staircase might be open or shut.

"Margaret, I advise you. You'd better be quiet."

"No, I shan't be quiet—and you can't make me. I'll say what I think. Knock me about again. Go and get a horsewhip and thrash me as you thrashed Ena, and it won't make a bit of difference. . . . Don't lie. You know

very well that you did . . . you did—you did. She had the marks on her body. Dr. Forwood saw them. . . ."

Yet they still were husband and wife. She still lay in his arms sometimes, as if he and she were united as any other married couple. They had brief reconciliations in the constant feud. Although she neither forgave nor forgot, she kept the truce until by a repetition of the old offence he compelled the renewal of their war.

On an afternoon during one of these lulls she had gone to the only accessible open space, a small recreation ground much frequented by poor little neglected children whose mothers were at work in the neighbouring factories, and she sat there unobserved and unobservant for nearly an hour. For the greater part of this time her mind was occupied retrospectively, but at intervals it took up the thread of current events.

She had been meditating on Andrew's conduct a year ago and the manner in which he was treating her now, when suddenly the two periods of time linked themselves together. All that was then mysterious, inexplicable, and had remained so till now, became in a moment transparently clear to her. But the thought involved was of so horrid a character that she at once endeavoured to reject it. She sat trembling, quailing. The thought had seemed to come unexpectedly, as if from nowhere; and soon, in spite of every effort to refuse it acceptance, it seemed to take to itself all the weight and convincingness of an intuition.

Her trembling ceased. She sat rigidly, with clenched hands, until she sprang up from the bench and moved swiftly to the gate of the ground. A greater fury and disgust possessed her than she had ever felt before.

That evening he returned at his usual time, and yet it

seemed to her that half the night was going while she waited for him. Her agitation increased rather than lessened. It was impossible to her to remain still. She paced the small bedroom, went out into the passage, stood at her window looking down into the lamp-lit street, watching for him intently, never giving a glance at the house opposite. At last he came.

"Andrew," she called, "I want you. Here, please. I have something to say to you."

She closed the door behind him, and moved round so that they were face to face, with all the light from the gas-jet on him. He noticed that she was very pale, and he could hear her quick panting breath. These signs, together with the gesture of her hand going upward to her bosom, infallibly presaged a storm.

"Well, what is it?" he said doggedly. "More tantrums?"

Then she made her accusation. It sounded so monstrous, so full of suggestions implying a vileness and cruelty beyond all normal existence, that he might have been expected to repel it with violent wrath. But instead he only seemed startled and confused. He stared at her blankly, and saying nothing let her go on. When he spoke it was mumblingly and feebly, if not deprecatingly.

"You must be crazy," he said, "to get such ideas into your head. . . . I don't know where you get 'em. I suppose out of some rotten psychological book you've been reading."

"No," she said, raising her voice, "I haven't read any book. But I can read *you*."

His unnatural quietness, his guilty air, made her wild with rage. He who was always ready to blackguard her was doing no more than expostulate with her. Soon she altogether let herself go.

"Oh, don't be so silly . . . Margaret, don't be such an ass."

He continued to meet her fierce indictment in this

manner until she said something outrageously abusive of that other woman. Then anger roused him too. He tried to shout her down.

"Listen," she said, when the noise abated. "Look me in the face. Ah, you can't. Now stop denying it. If not, why? When you kiss me you won't look at me. Why? You're thinking of her—yes, you are. When you come behind me as you do, you shut your eyes. I saw you do it in the looking-glass."

Again he shouted.

"Oh, I understand, Andrew. I've riddled it out at last. It isn't only that you want Ena. You try to persuade yourself that you've got her. When you turn out the light you're pretending that I am Ena. But I'm not. I'm not that——"

"Take care."

"What am I to take care of? Not you. I've done with you—and about time—God in heaven, about time! I meant to leave you a year ago, when you first began it. Ah, ha! Yes, to be sure! Ena liked all that beastliness, didn't she? Or was she coy? Yes, she resisted—for fun. She put you off, to draw you on. So you were pleased if *I* struggled. You told me to fight—because Ena did. You brute—you brute."

He was waving her off. He stepped back from her. He shouted that she was to keep away.

But she would not. She moved after him. Livid, with distorted features, she pushed her face towards his.

"A grand reward, if I took it. To be your consolation—a nice mechanical toy for you to play with—the sham Ena, to play with in the dark, and help you bear the loss of the real one. No, thank you." As she said this her overstrained voice broke. She dropped her hands to her side and made throat sounds like moanings. And her next words were piteous. "Oh, Andrew, the unfairness! For I ask you again. What did Ena ever give you that I couldn't?" And now

she once more took fire. "Ena never cared for you. Any love she was capable of she had given to other men, not you."

"That's a lie."

"It's the truth—and you know it is. If it was a lie, you wouldn't mind. She gave herself to everybody."

"I tell you—I warn you—be quiet."

"She did—she did. To everyone. She was a common prostitute. . . ."

Then he hit her. She gave a howl of rage rather than pain. And he hit her again. But still she stormed at him; and once more he hit her.

"There. Now perhaps you'll hold your tongue."

Shoulders hunched, hands in pockets, he slouched down into the street and walked along it with a hang-dog air.

She lay upon the floor dizzy from his blows, making a noisy sob every now and then.

It was a very long time since George Ryan had heard anything of Margaret Lane and his estranged friend, her husband. Now, on his return from a pleasure trip round the world, he endeavoured to get into touch with them again. Fortune had continued to smile upon him, but in spite of his prosperity he had not married. Perhaps the immediate aim of his lengthy voyage had been to escape the remonstrances or importunities of an honest young woman who considered that he was treating her rather badly.

He asked for news of Andrew at the Napier Club, and was not surprised to hear from the hall-porter that Mr. Lane had ceased to be a member.

Then he wrote to Margaret at the Westbourne Park address and waited impatiently for an answer. It did not come. Every morning, at breakfast in the nicely-furnished service flat in St. James's Place that he had taken for the summer, he looked eagerly among his letters, and after each morning's disappointment he thought of her with admiration and fondness. What a tip-topper she was. He earnestly hoped that in all these months things had gone well with her. But why didn't she write to him?

At last his letter came back through the post office with a scrawl on the envelope—"*Gone away. Address not known.*" He was disturbed now as well as disappointed. This return of the letter seemed ominous of misfortune. People who are doing even fairly well in the world will not allow their whereabouts to be unknown. They register their new address. They take care that letters shall be sent after them. Poor Mrs. A.!

But then he considered the lapse of time. It was ages since that visit to her lodgings after he had discovered

through the solicitors where she was then living. Good gracious, yes—nearly two years ago! Perhaps the luck had turned for her as it did for him. And he thought, "But I can't sit down guessing. I must ascertain for myself. Mrs. A.—Margaret! I have lost you and found you twice. I must do it for the third time."

He was passive for a few days, but he could not get her out of his thoughts. All that was kindly and generous in his nature stimulated him to make a movement in her direction, to repeat his offers of assistance if she needed aid, to congratulate and make merry with her if all was well; and yet he hesitated and delayed.

What had been his feelings towards her? Much stronger than she believed, and stronger than he himself had suspected. It wasn't merely that he admired her, although it had begun that way. He had felt small in her presence just at first; but then, finding her so amiable and jolly, never trying to keep him at a distance, he had become quite soft about her. Then after the separation when they came together again the softness rapidly increased. He was gone on her. Looking back at those Bloomsbury walks and the long evening conversations in that ugly little sitting-room, he seemed to feel now that he had been deeply in love with her. He had not acted devotion, it was real. A complete surrender to the cumulative spell. This seemed to be proved irrefutably by the clearness with which at any moment he could now recall her pale face, flushing so prettily if you riled her, her gentle voice with such deep full notes in it now and then, her eyes glowing in warm kindness when she was pleased with you, her sweet sensitive mouth shutting tight with a sort of eloquent firmness when she said no to something you ought not to have asked for, and above all else her jolliness, her laugh of comradeship, her frank unchecked gaiety whenever for a little while she was permitted to be happy and free from care. Yes, if she had encouraged him, as he once

accused her of doing, he would have gone straight on with it.

And again looking further back he thought that if she had been single he would have asked her, within a fortnight of their first meeting at that place in Lancaster Gate, to marry him. He would have never stopped asking her. Without knowing anything of her fortitude and endurance and splendid fidelity, he would have recognised that she would be a wife among a million. He knew afterwards of her noble care for Andrew, because Andrew himself had told him. Oh, why do the Andrew Lanes get women of that stamp, and never the George Ryans?

He decided to seek information from Mr. Yardley without any more delay. Write or telephone to him? No, go and see him. One would get more out of him that way. He was probably a decent old buster.

Received at the Sackville Street offices in a fine large room, with heavy window curtains and massive furniture, he found Mr. Yardley to be a thoroughly decent old buster, white-haired, big like his room, quite grand in manner, but extremely suave and polite too. Rather pompous soon, as George thought, for he let off the names of several great noblemen who were clients and also familiar friends. He told George that he was seventy-two years of age, still in harness, as one saw, but attending only to the affairs of old friends, leaving everything else to the younger members of the firm. He ran on garrulously, seeming fond of the sound of his own voice, as such old boys usually are. But George wanted him to talk.

When, however, after listening with exaggerated deference to a good deal of light chatter, George asked for specific information, Mr. Yardley assumed an attitude of professional reticence, became coldly dignified, and subjected the visitor to a close interrogation. What was Mr. Ryan's interest in Mr. and Mrs. Lane? It was some little time before he declared himself satisfied as to George's *bona*

fides. After that he consented to talk freely about the private affairs of "those two unfortunate people."

"For truly they are both unfortunate. I have known the two of them from childhood. *Him* I used truly to love, and for *her* I have the most profound respect. Well, what can I tell you that you don't know? He has ruined her, of course"; and he spoke of Margaret's sufficiency of means as an unmarried girl. "Every penny gone. I predicted that he would do it."

And Mr. Yardley described the later stages of their downfall so far as he was acquainted with them. If Margaret had followed his advice she would have got away from Andrew for good and all. He believed that in fact she had left him for a little while. But they had come together again. Her devotion to that man, in spite of the ill-treatment she received at his hands, was almost inconceivable.

"Last time I saw her," said George, "I wanted very much to help her—financially, you know—but she wouldn't let me."

"No," said Mr. Yardley, "I can well believe that. Proud and self-reliant from girlhood." Then he related how, on learning that they were in real trouble, he had sent to each of them sums of money on the pretence that these amounts were due and had not been accounted for. Of course no such money was in truth owing. But he had continued to send it from time to time until Margaret discovered the deception. "After that she wouldn't take another penny—and she said she hoped to pay me back one day."

"Very proud," said George. "But I admire her for it. Don't you?"

"Oh, undoubtedly. But, poor woman, Andrew has worn down her pride since those days. Yes, a few months ago she consented to something that she would certainly have refused then. She allowed me to make an appeal to a relative of his."

Nobody but himself, said Mr. Yardley, could have done it; and although he failed, he deserved credit for the attempt. Then with genuine regret at the want of success, but evident relish in his narration, he described how he had rushed Margaret up to Yorkshire to see Andrew's wealthy and eccentric old cousin, Sir Jerome Burnett. As if the smallest details were important, he gave a sketch of the old fellow's manner of life, all alone with a few elderly servants in his magnificent Georgian house, surrounded by miles of walled park. "A palace," said Mr. Yardley, "no less." Palladian front—two enormous wings—stone bridge and vista right across the ornamental water—and the whole thing going to rack and ruin because the eccentric owner, although so rich, grudged spending a farthing on upkeep!

"It was better," said Mr. Yardley, "while he had his widowed sister with him. She was Lady Westerham, a great friend of mine—a dear good soul. Since her death Sir Jerome simply won't keep it up."

Finally came the description of how Mr. Yardley "bearded the lion in his den." He had obtained access through the kind offices of another good friend—Reynolds, Sir Jerome's elderly valet. He had squared Reynolds easily enough. Reynolds had agreed to place the lady in a small apartment beyond the hall and near the foot of the great staircase, and to produce her when Mr. Yardley was taking leave, unless she had been previously summoned to Sir Jerome's room.

Sir Jerome was not ill-pleased by Mr. Yardley's unexpected appearance, but he cut up rough directly he understood the purpose of this afternoon call. "Not a brass farthing of mine to that rascal." This was his answer to the request that he should do something, however little, for Andrew Lane. Mr. Yardley told him of Andrew's wonderful reformation and his subsequent relapse; he sang the praises of poor Margaret; he suggested that for her sake

if not for Andrew's the old man should be generous, overlook past offences, and save one who used to be like a son in this very house from abject want and disgrace. But it was all without avail. The old man remained implacable.

"So then I said, 'If I had brought his wife with me, would you have talked to her?' 'Certainly not,' he snapped out. 'What should I have to say to her—except that I'm sorry for her? She may be all you tell me, but she must be a rare fool into the bargain, or else she wouldn't have married him . . .' Well, he came with me to the top of the main staircase. I lured him halfway down, just chatting, and exactly halfway down he stopped. I couldn't make him budge. So I talked louder, so that Reynolds should hear me. 'Who's that?' said Sir Jerome. Reynolds had brought her out. I called down to her, 'I'm coming, Margaret;' and then I turned to him. 'It is Andrew's wife,' I said. 'Now won't you shake hands with her?' He went slowly down and did it. Eccentric or not, a great gentleman, you know. Nobody could have been more courteous. 'My dear young lady,' he said, 'I hope you are not tired from your journey.' And he went on with something about the difficulties of being hospitable in a house without a mistress. Beyond 'How do you do?' Margaret never said a word. Was he impressed by her? I thought he was at the time, but now I don't know. She did not cause him to relent. He has done nothing. Perhaps he may, some day or other. You never can tell."

After this abortive effort, Mr. Yardley, altogether on his own responsibility, had applied for aid to Margaret's mother.

"What's her mother like?"

Mr. Yardley pursed his lips. "Self-centred. She lives at Westmouth—with another old lady. She wrote a very unsatisfactory reply." As he said this he opened a drawer of his table and drew out some papers. "Shall I show it to you? I don't know why not. Read it."

George Ryan glanced through the letter, reading a sentence here and there.

My dear old friend, I think you know me too well to misjudge me. . . . This crippling taxation has rendered me as powerless as other people. . . . Very difficult to make both ends meet . . . Margaret surely does not expect me to relieve her of the consequences of her own rashness. . . .

George put the letter on the table and spoke indignantly. "Selfish old cat, I should say."

But then soon his indignation rose to a far greater height. He said he had been struck by the significant manner in which Mr. Yardley had spoken of the ill-treatment Margaret met with. What did Mr. Yardley mean exactly? Not physical violence?

But Mr. Yardley said he feared he had meant that. He guessed as much, he did not know. The whole thing was most lamentable. Always the victim of an uncontrolled temper, Andrew would go from bad to worse. It was difficult to foresee where he might end. "Yes, truly lamentable!"

This disclosure or surmise upset George Ryan so completely that some little while passed before he grew calm again. Mr. Yardley had told him where he would find Margaret, and he uttered words of caution with regard to Andrew. If George found Andrew there too, he must be very careful.

"I'm not afraid of the infernal scoundrel," said George hotly.

"No, but remember that for any imprudence on your part *she* may suffer afterwards."

It was one of several large new blocks of workmen's dwellings at Chelsea; prisonlike, but of decent wholesome

appearance, with little iron balconies rising in tiers before the external windows, iron fire staircases, and high stone arches for the main entrances. On that same afternoon George Ryan went there. The hall-porter of Block B. in his shirtsleeves had been sweeping with a broom, and was recognisably a retired non-commissioned officer even before he put on his coat and displayed his medals. He answered George's question civilly.

"Second to your left, sir. *Inquiries*. You'll see it on the door. Go right in."

George pushed back the door with the word "Inquiries" on it, and stood in a small stone-paved lobby or passage. On the right of him there was a closed door and in front of him a door wide open. Through this opening he could see the end of a bed, a chair with some garments on it, the corner of a deal chest of drawers, and a carpetless floor. Then next moment he saw Margaret.

"George!" she said quietly. "What a surprise."

But she did not look surprised. She seemed neither glad nor sorry. As if automatically, she opened the door beside him and led him into a small room that appeared to be a sort of office or waiting-room. It had one of the cheap highly-varnished tables that one often sees in such places, and on the table were some formidable volumes like ledgers or account books. There were two chairs with wooden seats. A big cupboard, a "fitment" made of painted canvas and metal, projected from the distempered wall opposite to the hearth, which was occupied by an unlit gas stove.

"Isn't life queer?" he said nervously. "I have hunted you out again. There's luck in odd numbers. This is the third time."

"Yes," she said, with an uncheering smile, "history repeats itself. I am afraid I must be as rude as I was last time, and ask you to go—unless of course you've come on business. You aren't thinking of taking a *pied à terre* here,

are you? We have nothing vacant at the moment, but I could put your name down on our list of applicants."

"No, my dear."

"Then please go."

"Why?"

"Well, for one thing, I'm not supposed to have visitors—and for another, Andrew is hanging about somewhere. You had better not meet him."

"All right, but spare me a few minutes. There—that's history again. What I was always saying—in the old days."

She sat down wearily on one of the wooden chairs, and he seated himself on a corner of the table close to her. His facetious manner had gone from him as if never to return. The sight of her, the sound of her voice, filled him with an emotion infinitely stronger than he had anticipated.

"So Andrew's here. Then that means that you are still living together?"

"Oh, yes," and she laughed. "I still make a home for him. It's all very nice. There's a gas ring in there that's a kitchen by itself—and we have the general kitchen for regular cooking. No one could complain of the arrangements here."

"Margaret," he murmured chokingly, "you are very splendid."

"Yes, aren't I?" she said with another laugh. "A credit to the establishment. Splendid to look at too. So grandly dressed," and her hands moved slowly to her hips, and seemed to smooth the poor shabby black frock as though she pretended it was new and beautiful. "Would you like to take me out and show me off to your friends? . . . 'Gad, there's old George Ryan picked up a dashed smart woman. Lucky dog.'" Then her tone changed. "Look here. I've told you he may be coming in. You'll be sorry if he does."

"I'm already sorry. I can't ever be sorrier than I am now"; and he spoke compassionately. He said it had grieved him terribly to learn of all the trouble that she had

been through. Things he had heard about her overwhelmed him with grief. He must and would rescue her from these dreadful conditions.

She listened or at least let him go on talking. She was thinner, and her eyes seemed larger and darker; her whole face had become more delicate, finer, and in her quietness she gave an impression of the strength that sometimes comes to those who have ceased to hope and are merely submitting. Even as George pleaded with her he was thinking of how adversity had set a nobler stamp upon her and made her lovely now as well as lovable.

"Margaret, you can't go on with it." He took her hand, and it lay cold and limp in his. She did not withdraw it. In the past the things that he was saying would have made her eyes soften, and perhaps have brought tears to them. Now they were hard and dry. She seemed to have the coldness that falls upon things that have been most full of brightness and warmth, such as a sunlit landscape when the sun has gone down, or an ash-strewn hearth when the fire has utterly burnt out, and yet she seemed to him so noble, so unspeakably fine. "Margaret Mrs. A.—my own dear Mrs. A."

"Dear old George."

And then, as in other and calmer moments he himself might have phrased it, he went off the deep end. He implored her to come away with him. He said he loved her, adored her, but he would ask nothing from her that she did not feel disposed to grant. He would wait patiently and serve her faithfully. He worshipped her, but quite unselfishly. They could live quite happily just as brother and sister. She knew him, she could trust him.

"Don't be silly," she said. "You don't want a sister, and no one could want me as anything else."

But he poured out protestations of love and respect, vowing that she was the only woman in the world that he had ever cared for. He said he would not rest until he had

made her secure and happy. He could not possibly leave her here at the mercy of Andrew. She was in positive danger. The kindest thing one could say of Andrew was that he had become insane. And who can tell what a madman may do?

"No, I'm all right," she said in so low a voice that he barely heard the words. "All right, George. Andrew has faults—but I'm his wife."

"You needn't be—any longer than you please. Have done with him. A magistrate would give you a separation order to-morrow. He bullies you."

"No," and she shook her head.

"He does. He maltreats you—beats you—I know it. People have told me so."

"What's that?" She had snatched her hand from his, and she spoke loudly. "Who told you? Where have you been prying?" She was on her feet, and she glared at him. Her sudden fierceness was incredibly startling. "Suppose he does, what the devil's that got to do with you? I haven't asked you to interfere between him and me. Why do you come pushing your nose into things that don't concern you; and never will?"

"Margaret, my dear," he said with gentle reproachfulness, "I have told you how terribly I want to help you."

"I don't need help—from you or anybody on earth."

Then as suddenly as she had risen she sat down again. She folded her hands on her lap and was silent. For a little while he did not dare speak to her, he scarcely dared to look at her.

"Margaret!"

Those dried-up eyes were wet now. The tears welled out from them and ran down her cold cheeks in rivers. She unlocked her hands and stretched one of them towards him, offering it.

"Sorry!" And she sobbed. "Very sorry, George, old man. You're always kind and good to me. Yes—you mean

so well, but you really have a rather nasty trick of upsetting me"; and she tried to smile through the tears. "Thank you." She shook his hand firmly, and began to dry her eyes. Then she got up and moved to the door. "Once more—and for the last time—good-bye."

He had to go. What else could he do? But he made her take an envelope on which he had written his address and telephone number. He said that if ever he could be of use she was to let him know.

She went with him into the outer hall, and hurriedly overtook him as he moved away.

At the entrance Andrew Lane and the hall-porter were chatting amicably, the porter seated, and Andrew lounging against the wall. Margaret had touched George's arm as a warning, and she walked at his side, keeping between him and her husband. She wished that she could have attracted the porter's attention and put him on his guard too. She thought that there would certainly be a fight. But nothing happened.

"All right," George whispered; and, although with defiance and hatred in his heart, he constrained himself to give a nod of the head and some word of recognition to the enemy.

Andrew undoubtedly had seen him from the moment of his appearance in the hall. He stared at him and, totally disregarding his greeting, continued talking to the porter.

Margaret went out to the pavement with George and stood there. When she re-entered the building and passed through the hall Andrew was in the same attitude, pursuing his uninterrupted conversation with the porter. He did not even look at her as she went by them.

It had been dark when he last opened his eyes. Now awaking, if the transition from bemused slumber to semi-consciousness can be called awaking, he saw that it was daylight. He groaned. He only knew that his head was splitting, and that he was being invaded with a nausea more frightful than the abominable qualms which make weak-hearted voyagers think they will die before the ship reaches port.

"Margaret," he called hoarsely. "Margaret, I want you."

She did not answer. Without raising his head he looked round. Not their room. Where in hell was he?

A dark-haired, untidy woman came into the room and went out. Then she was there again, and a man too. They both stood there looking at him.

"Feel sick?" the man asked. "There's a pail by you."

"That's it—sick," Andrew said plaintively, with closed eyes, shuddering. "Get me some stuff. I want an injection. What's its name? Apo-apomorphine! Forwood knows. Forwood did it. Fetch Dr. Forwood."

They laughed and left him.

He lay there for hours, and little by little recent events presented themselves to his confused mind. In a public-house behind the King's Road that dark-haired, repulsive slut had offered herself as a sweetheart for the night. Although he pooh-poohed the suggestion, they sat drinking together. Then her friends began to arrive, until there was a gang of them. He stood treat for all, and they drank in noisy good-fellowship for a long time. He had a lot of money. But how? What money? Margaret's wages? No, much more than that. Then he remembered that it

came from a friend. Seeing the name of Dick Lorimer in a newspaper, he had written to him on the off chance, asking to borrow twenty pounds, and Lorimer sent it—notes by registered post. He and the girl and the bevy of toughs, his new pals, had left Chelsea fairly full up, and gone by train from Sloane Square to Aldgate. Then they were at a music-hall in Whitechapel, with good fun and more drink; and after that he seemed to remember more noise in some snug little private boozing kennel, but always more drink; and then finally here. But where? Some beastly slum!

He slept again. It was daylight, night, another day. He did not go till the evening. When he had huddled on his clothes and was ready, they tried to stop him. They wanted money.

He told them there was none. They had had it all out of him.

"Oh, gammon. You can get s'more. A gent! You've only to write to yer friends to get it."

"I haven't any friends left," he muttered drowsily. "I've tired them all."

"Come on now. No blather."

The obstructors to his path were two—one of them a big ill-favoured ruffian, who now began to hector and threaten; the other a ratlike man outside the opened door, probably with some kind of weapon, bar of iron, sandbag, zinc tubing, anything effective and easy to wield.

Andrew swayed, put his hand to his forehead. He looked dreadful, unwashed, unshaven, his neck showing collarless above the turned-up jacket. Then he seemed to become aware of the big man, as if till then he had hardly noticed him.

"Bully? What—Alphonse—my lady's fancy man! There's no accounting for tastes," and he laughed. "Get out of the light, you ugly swine . . . And you, too, you bloody little pimp and pickpocket."

He was redoubtable still. They let him go. Not worth

a scrap. Nothing but trouble to come of it if they bashed him. And perhaps—who can say?—they liked his pluck. At any rate he was talking their own language. They could understand one another.

Soon he was in a broad road, among lamps, omnibuses, trams, civilisation. "What street is this?" he asked. Somebody told him that it was the Commercial Road.

He wandered away, not yet able to think clearly. But he said to himself several times, "Can't go back to her after this. Can't go back to her. No, this is the end."

That first night he slept out, on the steps beneath a factory door, in the angle of two blank walls, and under a footbridge He was roused and made to move on by policemen, who finding that he was sober, were not unfriendly. They told him he should have gone to a doss-house.

"Couldn't afford that, old chap. The casual ward is more my ticket."

"Well, why not?"

"I should have been too late to get in, if I had thought of it—and I didn't think of it."

In the morning he came out by the river with the broad flow of Limehouse Reach before him. Although the month was May, it seemed bitterly cold. Wind ruffled the water and little waves made a queer rattling noise as they broke against the timbers of the landing-stage on which he was standing. He shivered.

The sickness had gone. He began to feel hungry; and as the long hours dragged on before the life and business of the day showed any signs of starting, his hunger steadily increased. He wandered about aimlessly. About the time that the shops opened he had gone back to the main thoroughfare again, and was strolling westward.

Somehow or other he must get some food. Once more he searched his pockets. Perhaps those people had left him

a few coppers. No, there was nothing. He strolled on dejectedly. Then he went into a post office, and using a telegraph form wrote a message to Mr. Yardley:

S.O.S. Down and out. For heaven's sake let me have a fiver. Please give it to the bearer.

Andrew Lane.

Having written this he asked for an envelope; but the boon was refused.

So far nobody had noticed him. As he approached the centre of the town, however, he met suspicious glances. Policemen now scowled in the most unfriendly way. He did not look like a tramp, but a bad character. Even the fact of his having no hat rendered him conspicuous.

He was tired when he reached the brightness and thronged traffic of Piccadilly Circus, and his entirely empty stomach sent feeble pangs and little throbs of discomfort upward to his troubled brain. He looked about him now, seeking necessary aid. Then at the entrance of a mews he found a seedy-looking young man and talked to him.

"Want a job?" he asked.

"Yes, same as yourself."

The young man was at first shy. Andrew explained his difficulty. Being a bit off colour himself, and not attired for polite society, he wanted a messenger to take a note into the offices of his lawyer and bring him back the answer. But the young man did not care for the sound of all this. He seemed no less suspicious than the West End police.

"You're a toff, aren't you? Should be by yer way o' speaking. Then what yer bin up to? Anyway, I don't wish to be drawn in."

They talked for nearly half an hour, and at last the young man accepted the commission with the promise of adequate reward.

Mr. Yardley's offices being situated near the top of

Sackville Street, Andrew despatched his messenger from the corner of Vigo Street and stood there waiting. The young man returned in five minutes with the telegraph form undelivered. Mr. Yardley had not yet arrived, but he was expected soon.

They waited then, and after what seemed an immense time, Andrew, skulking at the corner, saw his respectable friend and constant well-wisher alight from a motor-car and enter the doorway. A sense of bitter shame oppressed him at the sight of the white-haired, fresh-complexioned old man, so spruce and trim in the good clothes, with a small leather case carried jauntily. Hunger was gnawing his entrails, but he would have starved to death rather than present himself before Mr. Yardley in his present abject plight.

The young man was despatched again, and Andrew stood on guard, nearer the offices now, but at a point where he could not be seen from their windows. He dared not allow a chance of a bolt being done with the swag, should the errand reap any. Ten anxious minutes elapsed. Then the young man reappeared and handed him a sealed envelope.

"He arst where you were, but I says I didn't know. Is that right?"

"Quite," said Andrew. With eager fingers he was breaking the seal as he hurried round the corner into Vigo Street. In the envelope there was not money, but a cheque. He examined it with sharp anxiety . . . To bearer. Pay cash! Bond Street Branch . . . "Yes, that's quite right. Only I still need you."

They trudged off to the bank, and once more Andrew stood on guard. Now was an opportunity to be played false. The moment the young man emerged from the grand swing doors Andrew seized him. In his eagerness he was a little rough.

"Got it?"

"'Course I've got it. There y'are. Hands off. What

yer thinkin' about?" The young man was offended and resentful. "Now you just pay up."

"Yes, I will," said Andrew apologetically. "But some food first. Take me somewhere where we can have a bite."

They went to a little place that was ordinarily frequented by cab-drivers, van-men, packers, and other workers in the immediate neighbourhood. At this hour of the morning they had it to themselves. When their meal of fried eggs and hot strong tea was over, Andrew pushed a ten-shilling note across the table to his companion.

"Well, you're a toff and no mistake." The young man was overwhelmed. "Ten bob. Very liberal," and they shook hands. "Cheerio."

"The same to you," said Andrew, "and many of them."

He worked his way back to the East End, as if it was now the part of London to which he belonged, and obtained accommodation at a common lodging-house, for men only, paying some extra pence for the use of his cubicle by day as well as night. Here he washed. Then he went out to get shaved, and to buy a cheap hat. He also bought a scarf to put round his neck in lieu of a collar and tie. And while out he sent a telegram to his wife telling her that she was not to worry, for he was all right. These things accomplished, he went back to the lodging-house and slept.

Next day he spent in wandering about by dock gates and canal bridges, or lounging beside the river, idly watching from a distance men load ships, steer barges on the flood tide, manœuvre cranes and carry sacks up narrow planks, watching anything that momentarily caught his eye and seemed of interest, but all through the day despair was slowly taking possession of him.

He recognised his situation in the scheme of things with a hitherto unattainable lucidity. He saw himself

as a miserable, dishonoured man. There was nothing new in the mingled shame and repentance for past misdeeds. As that doctor had told Margaret when describing the common characteristics of his malady, he must often have felt ashamed as the fumes of alcohol passed from his blood on recovering from each of his innumerable excesses; he must have strenuously upbraided himself and registered quite sincere promises of amendment. Indeed so much had been true of him in very early times. Even at Westmouth, when there had been little remission of the vice, but merely low points and high points in the curve that might have recorded its practice, he had often hated himself for his weakness, and longed for strength to escape from an abject thraldom. But now it was an immensely more poignant remorse. Then, and ever since that time, he had made vows. Now he made none. He had always braced his nerves and looked at the future, if not very hopefully, at least hardily and defiantly. Now he did not look at it. It was not there. He was done for.

This was his real awakening. Another and less experienced doctor had spoken of the efficacy of shock in such a case, and had asked how could one expect ever to give him a shock. Well, at last he had given it to himself. The realisation of his limitless debasement affected him as nothing else could have. The internal explosion of self-contempt was necessarily stronger in the havoc it wrought than any sorrow or regret that came to him from external causes. The grief at Ena's death shook him. The final acceptance of his own degradation overthrew him.

Moreover, his new state of mind could not have been evolved at that period. Because of Margaret he was capable of forming these thoughts and having these feelings now. They would have been impossible at the beginning, when Ena died; but the years of decent living before the collapse, the companionship with one who was guided by high ideals and lofty aspirations, had opened mental paths

that were either lost in childhood or blocked by the ruin and the débris of a profligate maturity. Because of Margaret he had often struggled to think clearly. Because of her he had for a long time fought hard to live worthily. And strangely, although in these fights he had been continually the conquered and never the conqueror, the repeated failure had not added to his characteristic weakness. Strangely, indeed, it was now in the hour of despair that something akin to a complete restoration of will-power had been vouchsafed to him. But he was not conscious of this. Perhaps he never would be aware of it. Nevertheless it was there. Now that strength, hope, the likelihood of fulfilling any sane intention, seemed to have been drained out of him, and only a weak sadness and a melancholy acquiescence remained, he was nearer to a display of firm volitional force than in all his life he had ever been.

Contrition, vain regret, a sadness that numbs the heart and yet seems to stimulate the brain's activity. Emotion, a yearning of the affections, infinite sorrow for infinite loss, the hopeless apathy that a condemned man may feel when friends have expended their last efforts without avail and even a reprieve has been refused—and yet all the while his thoughts went on working steadily. Despair but not fear. He had never been afraid, and he did not fear now.

The one logical thought that had presented itself in his fuddled condition had become dominant now that his mind was clear. From its first perception it had the solidity that any thought possesses when once it has clothed itself in plain and simple words. Now gradually it seemed to be crystallising; in every hour that passed it seemed to grow harder, more rigid, more completely unchangeable. The words of it kept repeating themselves, almost as if they

were the cruel and unforgettable words said to him by someone else and not chosen by himself. "I can't go back to her. No, it is the end. It ought to be the end. I must make it the end." And yet in truth, by an undetected progression as their import deepened, he had both changed the words and added to them. "I must make it the end." This last additional sentence was both a modification of meaning and an enhancement of weight.

But there need not be any hurry—at any rate until his money was exhausted, and that would not be immediately. At last he had cut down his expenses to a really low figure. No one could deny that he was ceasing to be a spendthrift. Eating little, sleeping much, wandering here and there as before, he let the days pass.

He went often to the river. The river seemed to draw him—not because he meant to use it for his purpose, but perhaps because he felt that its broad tide ebbing fast towards the sea symbolised the whole drift of his thoughts. Once when down there he was worried by a little girl to whom he had shown kindness. She was a daughter of the lodging-house warden, and he had given her sixpence to buy herself some sweets. After this she had treated him as if he had been a dear friend and not merely a careless benefactor. She ran to him whenever she saw him. Then she began to follow him a part of the way on his rambles. On this evening she had come as far as his favourite haunt. With gentle firmness he had sent her home, but gave her another sixpence still further to soften the dismissal.

He had come upon this place accidentally, after going through an archway that was almost a tunnel. It lay between the high blank walls of two warehouses, a sort of long platform, once perhaps used as a steamboat pier, for the staging of brickwork and timbers had a strong wooden balustrading from which a few iron chains, broken and rusty, dangled forlornly, and a gap in the balustrade, filled now with some lower rails, suggested the position of a

gate or gangway. There were no benches. It might have been made pleasant with seats, a small resting-place for tired workers, a meeting-ground for lovers, but as it was it seemed to be wasted, derelict. No one came there. The sky, the water, the seagulls, and Andrew had it to themselves.

He sat there, on a loose pile of baulks, quietly musing.

"She would take me back, if I let her. Margaret! .... No, my dear, you asked for fairness. You shall have it."

Sadness, yearning, but steady thought beneath any emotional confusion. He had wakened and he would never dream again. The sleep that was soon coming would be dreamless.

It was Margaret, not Ena, that he yearned for. All his thoughts of Ena were cold and sad, as if there had never been life or warmth in them. She had died now for the second time. And this renewal of death would be permanent, eternal.

He thought of her coldly, yet pityingly, and of himself in relation to her with a terrible remorse. How much of her life and of her death too was on his conscience! If women had hurt him, who could measure the extent of his injury to them? Ena! "I destroyed her. God forgive me. And I have tried to destroy Margaret."

But in each fresh thought of Margaret there was life and colour. Memory became warm again, vividly intense, active as live things should be and not dully brooding. He thought of Margaret's welcoming arms, that sweet, firm face against his, the clean, firm lips. And the spirit of her! The marvellous strength that nothing could daunt, the generous purposes that nothing broke. And yet in the insanity of a poisonous dream he had tried to wear out her love or to cast it away as worthless. He had pretended not to love her for herself—since pretence it must have been, a base and foolish simulation, "the joke" of a half-drunk man with inflamed brain and hell's fiery wickedness

in his infected blood. But he had loved her really. It seemed that even when he most abused his power over her he had never ceased in truth to love her . . . "Oh, God forgive me."

Then he thought of the bed he had lain in at that house of thieves, and the loathsome woman who had shared it with him. "No," he said aloud, "I can't go back to Margaret after that." He was shuddering, almost as if the vile sickness was about to begin again. With downcast eyes he walked away from the open space, the sunlit wharves, the sound of riverside life, as if wanting to hide himself in some dark cellar of the narrow, silent streets.

"Suppose that, after all, I tried again, what would happen?" Sometimes he played with this idea, turning it over in his mind and trying to see it from every side. But he knew that he would not adopt it. His determination remained as solidly firm even while he let his thoughts trifle with questions and speculations. Behind the resolve was the unchanging conviction of his desperate state. If he began again, everything would be repeated. He might keep straight for a little while, and then he would go down again —not lower, because that was impossible; he had already touched the bottom of the pit. But he would begin to fail physically as well as in all other ways. If not now, he would have to do it a few years later. And then his heart might have turned feeble and cowardly. He might choose the lowest form of life, with all its pains and penalties, rather than a decent and comparatively honourable self-extinction. As yet his bodily strength had not waned. The iron constitution diagnosed by Dr. Forwood had lasted through the years, and was still hardly, if at all, impaired by the violent tests it had undergone. He had withstood experiences that might have killed a hundred other men. At forty-five he looked younger than his age. He had no

consciousness of being softer of tissue or less hard of muscle than he had ever been. But in another ten years, if he tried to live them, what then? And ten years more? He endeavoured to see himself as he might be then, at sixty-five, bent and broken, racked by rheumatism, with jerky movements of the limbs and a face blotched all over with red eruptions.

"There. That's what I should look like." As he passed tavern doors he studied the people going in and out, and selected now one, now another, to represent the figure in his thoughts. One of them, an abject old man, came out and joined a most wretched-looking old woman who had been meekly waiting for him. Beside her on the pavement were a couple of plants in pots. She picked these up, when the foul, dirty, ragged, strengthless brute came to her, and put her shawl round them as they lay in her thin tired arm. He went shambling on without a word to her and she followed a few paces behind him. It was the wind-up of their long day's round. Those plants were the protection against police interference. They were carried as the semblance of something for sale. But the man was of course merely a beggar, a cadger. Andrew watched him, as if fascinated, until he and his follower vanished.

"There goes Andrew Lane. Yes, that is I, or something very like it, if I don't stop now." And as though to complete the picture of doom more terribly, he thought that the woman was Margaret. "That is what I might make of Margaret if I did not let her go."

That evening he wrote to her.

In this letter he told her of his sorrow at parting with her, and begged her to believe that he was not ungrateful. She must not think of him or fret about him, but just try and forget him. She would soon, he hoped, be happy. He said that his decision to go right away had been taken for her sake. She was to consider herself free of all obligations

towards him. She could be absolutely sure that she would never see him again.

Thank you. Bless you. Good-bye.

Andrew.

Except to that little pestering girl he had spoken with no one; but he talked to himself almost unceasingly, and sometimes as he listened in a profound external silence to the babbling voice that was his own, and yet seemingly prompted by a mysterious and uncontrollable second self, he laughed childishly. He was eating so little food and tramping so many miles between sunrise and sunset that at night he was perhaps almost light-headed. Nevertheless, however much tired and nervously exhausted, however strangely he mingled a piteous sardonic mirth with the essential gloom of his tragedy, the dominant thought retained its full power.

"I am going on a long journey," and he smiled and nodded his head as if recognising an old acquaintance. Tags of plays and grandiloquent phrases in novels, remembered now quite unexpectedly, seemed to be as amusing as appropriate. "It is a far, far better thing that I do now than I have ever done." . . . "I am making room in your life, my dearest" . . . "It is the only way" . . . "Yes, that's the stuff to give 'em," and he laughed louder. "Be sensible, old man." It was himself, not the idle chatterer, that had said this, warningly. How? When? And where? That was a game. And couldn't one have another question if flummuxed? "Why?" But he could answer that one. He knew *why* all right . . . *How* was more of a puzzler, but to all intents and purposes he had found his answer to that too. "Easier if someone would be so very kind and obliging as to put a pinch of prussic acid on my tongue like an unwanted worn-out dog. That's all I am." One can't buy poison from a chemist without a doctor's prescription. A revolver was unobtainable.

He might cut his throat, jump off the top of the Monument, get in front of a railway train; but those were ugly, dirty ways of doing the trick. Besides none of them would appear to be accidental. Margaret, at all costs, must be spared . . . For Margaret's sake, since it couldn't be done naturally, the manner of it must remain unknown. No more bother and fuss for her—with inquest, newspaper story, and all the rest of it. A clean-cut disappearance. Let her believe, as his letter implied, that he had deserted her. Let her think of him, if she continued to think of him, as having gone to America, Canada. Anywhere at a long distance—some bourne from which impecunious travellers such as he do not return . . . Yes, he knew how.

He would drown himself. But the river was no use—not a ha'porth of use. He had no doubt of his courage, but in the river it would be humanly impossible not to evade the death sentence. Primary instincts would be certain to overcome everything else. He must swim for life. He was a strong swimmer. He would just swim ashore, and stand in the mud and slime, dripping, shaking, and looking a draggle-tailed fool till the peelers came and ran him in . . . It must be from a ship at sea. No difficulties truly. But he had better keep some of his money in hand and not blow it all while shilly-shallying. For a small bribe he could easily get on one of those coal tramps or timber ships bound for the North Sea. Then as soon as they were well out, and night fell, drop very quietly over the side! It wouldn't matter if he fought then . . .

THE telephone bell had rung before George Ryan finished dressing, and he did not trouble to answer the summons. Then soon it rang again. Testily he went from his dressing-room and unhooked the receiver.

"Is that Mr. Ryan?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Margaret. I'm in great trouble. I want to come to you at once. May I?"

"May you? A thousand times yes. Come as quick as you can."

He tried to eat some breakfast, but was unable. Excited, nervous, anxiously wondering, he waited for her. What had happened? Could it be that already, within a fortnight since he had made his appeal, she felt herself forced to grant all or most of what he had asked? It must be that. What else could it be? She had decided to leave Andrew.

When he heard the sound of the lift doors he ran into the hall of the flat, to receive her with literally open arms. But she did not fall into them or allow them to surround her. She was white, tremulous, breathing as if she had climbed all those flights of stairs instead of being carried swiftly upward in the lift, and her first words told him how very far from the facts his surmise had been. She had not left Andrew. It was Andrew who had left her.

"You said you'd help. Help me to find him. I must get to him at once, or it will be too late."

George made her sit down and begged her to calm herself.

"Yes, I will, I will," she said agitatedly. "I want to tell you. Oh, George, be quick and clever for me. Find him. I'm so afraid—so dreadfully afraid."

Then she told her story. Andrew had absented himself as he had often done before, and she had not been perturbed until Mr. Yardley spoke to her on the telephone in a queer manner, asking her if she was all right and not ill. He had professed himself to be reassured by her reply. He had not said anything about her husband. Nor had she. That day she received a telegram from Andrew himself, telling her not to worry. But of course she had worried. He had never stayed away so long, and, as day after day passed, her fear augmented. Now this morning a letter had come from him, and it had filled her with such terror that she could scarcely breathe.

"But what are you afraid of?"

"What he says. Good-bye, and I won't see him again . . . George, I know it. I'm certain. He has given up . . . He means to commit suicide."

"Oh, no. Not in the least likely . . . Now don't cry."

"Yes, he'll do it unless I can get to him. He wouldn't if I was there."

"Can you show me his letter?"

"Yes, yes—I've brought it. You'll see."

George Ryan read the letter very slowly and very carefully, and then shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"My dear, there's absolutely nothing to justify your fear. Cheer up. What he says is as plain as the nose on my face—and that's plain enough, isn't it? Our good friend has made up his mind to do a prolonged bolt. For his own reasons, whatever they may be, he is leaving you. He sets you free and promises not to come back again . . . Now forgive me, but this is the best thing that could possibly have happened to you. It's a blessing quite without disguise."

But Margaret was not to be consoled or persuaded. George's arguments merely added to her distress. She frantically urged him to think for her, act for her—give help and not talk. She said he did not understand. He did

not know Andrew. Everything in Andrew's conduct had been different from the past, altogether strange and ominous. When he went on the loose he never bothered his head about her. Never once had he sent her a message during his absence. Besides, if he had been racketing about, if he had been drinking, he *couldn't* have written that letter. It was different from any letter she had ever had from him. Instead of a hurried scrawl, it was carefully written, with consideration given to each word. It was intended to deceive her. What George thought was what Andrew meant her to think—that he was going away from England and abandoning her. But it was not so. She could not be deceived. She *knew*.

"Has he ever threatened to do it?"

"Yes, he has—he has. A year ago he said it often—threatening that he would if I wasn't quiet—if I got on his nerves. Oh, George! What *can* I do?"

"All right," said George. "I'll get busy Let me take the letter and the telegram too. I'll go to Yardley's first. And you wait here . . . You're cold. I'll tell the man to light the fire. This May weather! . . . All right, Margaret. . . . We'll find him for you."

They succeeded in tracing him.

Mr. Yardley at once obtained assistance from some private inquiry agents with whom his firm were well acquainted, and during the course of the day one of these experts did a great deal. Andrew's messenger had been recognised by a clerk in Mr. Yardley's office as a loafer or cab-runner, often seen. He had been seen as lately as yesterday. He was easily produced. He told them, amongst other things, that Andrew said he had walked all the way from the East India Docks; and the private detective was strongly of opinion that if the gentleman had come from

the East End he would go back there. Gentlemen of his class when in trouble liked the East and were shy of the West. The post-mark on the letter and the handing-in place for the telegram corroborated this opinion. Mr. Lane must be looked for in those quarters. He would not have quitted them.

The inquiry agent failed to do more than this, and next day he advised that, if time urged, then the regular police would be the people to hasten matters. If they could be really set in motion, they would perform miracles. The police consented at least to attempt them. In the person of a detective inspector they said with regard to the missing party, that a man like that, shabby and uncared for, and yet with five pounds in his possession, would almost certainly be noticed down East.

And in the evening of that day they reported that at a certain lodging-house a man had attracted attention by changing two or three one-pound notes. The man answered the description supplied. His friends had better go and identify him. In the lodging-house keeper's register the man had given his name as Imberfell, but very few real names were used at such places.

"It's Andrew," cried Margaret. "Imberfell is the name of Sir Jerome's place in Yorkshire. Imberfell Court! . . . Take me to him."

It was late. The sun had gone down an hour ago, and these narrow ill-lit streets became blacker and more evil-looking every minute. Appalling men, some nearly in rags, shambled towards the lodging-house door and crept in. Now and then a more decent figure went past as they stood watching. But the man called Imberfell did not come.

Neither Margaret nor George had any doubt that this

was Andrew's place of residence. He had been there till mid-day. He might return at any moment, or he might stay out till nearly dawn.

The warden of the place, rendered solicitous by those police inquiries, was heartened by the aspect of a swell gent and an agitated lady, and George's large tip put him quite at his ease. He came out and talked to them, expressing sympathy and good-will. He was sorry that they should be so put about and have so long to wait.

Great as was Margaret's agitation, she behaved reasonably and spoke calmly. She assured George that he might trust her fully. But she said again and again that she must be left alone with Andrew. It was of paramount importance that she should have him all to herself. If George interfered, indeed if he said a word to Andrew, all her influence over him would be of no avail.

George agreeing, they had stationed themselves at a distance from the doors they were watching. When Andrew appeared she was to go to him. George had reluctantly given his word not only to leave her alone with her husband, but to go back to his flat. On her side she undertook to give him information at the earliest possible moment of what was happening.

But now the warden returned to them. This time he had a child with him. He said she was his daughter, and he had "hoicked her out o' bed" because it had occurred to him that she really knew more about the ways of the absentee lodger than he did.

"The kid b'lieves she could drop on him sence he's still out."

"I know where he mostly goes," said the child.

"There," said the warden. "Would you care to let her try? . . . Phyllis, can you conduct this lady and gentleman and point him out to them?"

"Yes," said the little girl; "natchrally I can. I've said so, haven't I?"

Margaret and George went with her. She was about twelve years of age, undersized, pitiably thin, a wizened little creature, but self-confident, saying childish things with the air of a grown-up woman. She told them he was a nice man, "on'y timid, keeping to hisself, not liking comp'ny." He had given her two sixpences. "For me'self. I didn't tell fawther."

At first George thought she was leading them to a public-house frequented by Andrew; but she said no, their destination was "outside." They went on for half a mile through more dark streets, over a footbridge, and among factory walls. It was all silent and deserted down here. They passed very few people.

"'Ere we are," said the little girl. "Now you best let me go on a bit, and I'll see."

She disappeared. But in a minute or two she came running back to them.

"He's there—just where I said. Take my 'and. It's dark under the arch."

Margaret grasped the child's hand, and spoke to George in a whisper. "You must take her home—and give her money. Then go home yourself, as you said. I'm all right now."

But at this last moment George begged her to let him remain.

"Think. You may need me. He may be rough—angry with you for coming."

"He won't be angry," she said. "But if he saw you, he would be. Then I couldn't say what he would be like. With me alone, I answer for him."

She and the child went under a low arch, and Margaret felt a fresher, stronger air meeting her. The night seemed to have become much lighter. Westward the sky was faintly bright still. Then she saw the river, dark and vague, and heard that gentle lapping sound of the water as it swept

by the timber piles. This was the only sound as she left her guide and came out on the platform. Then a motor-boat with a tiny red light made a soft humming noise while it moved swiftly through the darkness towards the further shore. And then the noise of her own heart-beats seemed to obliterate the possibility of hearing anything else, however loud or insistent.

She had seen Andrew. Quite near—only a dozen paces away. He was leaning against the guarding barrier, with his back to the water, head bent, motionless.

She moved forward rapidly. Her hands had almost touched him before he heard her footfall or looked up. Her arms were round him before he could change his attitude or speak.

"Andrew," she wailed. "Oh, Andrew, my own Andrew, how can you be so cruel—so wickedly cruel to me?" She was clinging to him, holding him with all her strength. "Oh, thank heaven I'm not too late"; and then she broke down completely, weeping, gasping, choking.

He felt her body loosen and become limp, although the nervous grip of her hands did not relax. He was not angry, not even stern; but the quietness of his voice, contrasting so strangely with her own passionate tumult, brought back all her fear.

He asked her how and why she had come.

"I was afraid. Your dreadful letter! So I tried to find you. Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm here. Andrew, darling, I don't mind anything in the way you've treated me, or anything that can ever happen. I won't bother you or blame you. I won't mind anything while I have you safe. D'you hear? Now come with me."

"No, Maggs, I'm sorry, but that's impossible."

"Why not?" she cried. "Then it's what I thought. But you shan't do it. I won't let you."

"I don't know what you thought," he said, in the same

quiet tone. "But if you mean that you'll forgive me and take me back—for me to begin again—then I say no. I've come to my senses. It wouldn't be fair."

"I'm the judge. But I say yes, not no"; and her voice rose shrilly. In her fear and anguish she was fast becoming hysterical. "Listen. You've got to tell me the truth."

Then she accused him of having intended to take his life. He did not answer. He turned his head away for a moment, and his face that had seemed all white faded into the darkness. He was supporting her with his arm now, but she clung to him closer still and her voice was almost a scream.

"You don't deny it."

He turned his head and looked down at her, but she could not see his eyes or the look in his face.

"Margaret, dear. You—you're very good. But it's no use. This must really be the end of it. We must make it our good-bye."

"No," she cried, "you mustn't—you can't. You belong to me. You are mine, not your own. Good or bad, I want you. Are you listening, Andrew? You can't cheat me and betray me by leaving me alone."

It was pitiful, dreadful. Between her almost unintelligible entreaties, she panted and sobbed. Her voice was the harsh high-pitched clamour of hysteria. Once she laughed.

"Oh, no. That's all rot. I never heard such piffle. . . . Hold me as if you liked me—not as if you wanted to kill yourself to get away from me."

Then he felt her body stiffening. It seemed to grow rigid. She spoke with a terrible intentness.

"Why? Answer me. Is it Ena calling you? Because Ena isn't here you want to join her in another world. But you won't"; and then came a burst of that dreadful broken laughter. "She'll dodge you, my lad. She told you she wasn't afraid of hell, except that she'd meet you there. No, she'll be too clever for you. Dead or alive, you won't get your Ena."

"No," he said, "that's over. On my honour I don't think of her now. I only think of you."

"Yet you mean to leave me. Oh, it's too much. I can't bear it."

She was in a frenzy again, beating her forehead against his chest, writhing her body, gasping and wailing. He could have soothed and quieted her with a word, but he would not say it.

"Why? Because you're sick of life. . . . And that means you're sick of me."

"No," he said. "I'm sick of myself."

"Don't do it. Say you won't. Promise me. Have some mercy, even if you hate me. Can't you see you're driving me mad?"

And indeed she was like a mad woman, as suddenly she relaxed her grip and, pushing him from her, stepped back. Her hat had fallen. She brandished her arms wildly, and looked from side to side as if uncertain where she was. But she knew really.

"Margaret!"

"If you don't want me, keep away from me. Don't ever touch me again. Now answer. What is it to be?"

He was silent, looking at her but neither moving nor speaking.

"Very well," she said. "Then, damn you, I'll do it too.

She ran along the platform to the point where the guarding rails were lowest and clambered over them. He sprang after her, but she was too quick for him. When he reached her she was down below him, hanging by her hands or standing on a projection of the piers.

"Now we'll make it what you want. Good-bye"; and she threw herself off.

He gave a shout and plunged after her; but he had taken many strokes before he saw her, a black object being swept along by the tide, rolling over and over like a log, not like anything animate, much less a human creature struggling

or attempting to resist. He swam desperately. Once he saw her face, a faint white patch, but then instantly her back and thighs showed. Her head was under water; she was drowning fast.

At last he reached her, grasped her arm, and then with both hands held her neck. He pushed her before him, striving but often failing to keep her head above water. And now he thought that he could not save her. They seemed to be almost in mid-stream, and were carried swiftly. They would both drown.

He struggled to get back towards the shore, where moored barges beyond the tideway loomed high in the dark shadow of a wharf. Almost done, he got there, but was still swept on until, when they were nearly gone again, he had just enough strength left to clasp an anchor chain and hang to it. But with their weight on it the chain sagged downward. The swirl and race of the water submerged them. Each time that they rose and his mouth was free he shouted. These feeble breathless cries seemed to sound faintly even to himself. Hope was dying.

But then he heard answering calls. A boat came, and a man leaning over the side flashed a light full upon them. With another man helping, he pulled her up into the boat and Andrew after her. She lay in the bottom of the boat, and Andrew heard someone say: "She's not dead. She's still breathing."

Then they were at a landing-place. She was lying on the stone slabs unconscious, while a man stooped over her trying to induce artificial respiration. The light flashed on her white face and dripping muddy hair.

"See!" The stooping man put his hand into the light, and showed its fingers bright red above the mud-stained knuckles. "It's her head. She's hurt her head. She's bleeding. Give me a handkerchief."

She was in an infirmary, then in a public hospital, and then in a private nursing home. Friends had taken charge of her. Expense no longer mattered, since Mr. Yardley and George Ryan vied with each other in their eagerness to pay the bill, and even Mrs. Dacre, although not quite entering this contest, wished to contribute. Margaret accepted all things, her surroundings, the care, the affection, the outlay, with an apathetic submission. She thought that she was not going to live.

But the doctors said that this was a mere illusion. From the first her injuries had not been sufficient to justify fear. Evidently she had struck her head against the brick or woodwork at that place where she had her unlucky fall—for it was of course a mere accident this tumble into the Thames after dark. It is so easy to slip on slimy boards or wet stones. And how very fortunate that her husband was with her. The head wounds, broken collar bone, three bruised ribs, comprised the whole sum of damage. Nothing.

"Get well? Of course you'll get well, and be none the worse for it. Your idea is simply an illusion."

Illusion or not, it terrified Andrew. At the nursing home they were sorry for him. His love for her was so touching, his anxiety so difficult to allay. They thought of him as a model husband—and a fine-looking man into the bargain.

At the nursing home Margaret's progress towards recovery was so very satisfactory that the nurses rallied her.

"I'll tell you what it is. If you think you're going to peg out, it's because you want to. And that's very naughty of you."

They said this laughingly, as if the impossibility implied made it a good joke. But perhaps it was true. Her thoughts.

except that shame did not add to the burden of them, were almost identical with those that had driven Andrew to a phase of total despair. For herself she had lost hope, although, strangely, she could still go on hoping for him. For her it was the end. But for him it might still be only a beginning. And exactly in this manner Andrew had thought of her. At the heart of all his heavy brooding had been the not ungenerous feeling that he had come to the journey's end but that for her the road was open, and that without him she could go on safely.

Yes, it should have been the end.

She talked to herself as in the past. Nothing that Mr. Yardley and George Ryan said could rouse her to show the slightest interest in the future. She had no plans, she did not want plans made for her. She merely submitted to the life of each day as it went by her. Very soon she was to be sent to a convalescent home at the seaside. Then, after two or three weeks of strong air and intensively nourishing diet, she would be dismissed as a healthy person with the capacity to take up the duties of active existence.

What would she do with herself? Mr. Yardley wished to know. George Ryan, with many suggestions of his own as to how it should be answered, also asked the question. Andrew, it seemed, did not dare to ask it.

He was allowed to sit with her in the comfortable room at the nursing home whenever she pleased to have him there. In regard to other people he was no less submissive than she. He meekly and humbly obeyed orders. His state of mind was in truth pitiable. Once more he had received a shock, greater, more shattering than anything that preceded it. His remorse was a burning pain, a throb of horror, a deep unhealing wound, and not that dull diffusive sorrow that had oppressed him in his hopeless regret for old misdeeds. He knew now how terrible and impious it is even to

contemplate taking one's life. To fling himself from life to death had seemed a small thing. But Margaret! Yet he had driven her to an acceptance of the monstrous sacrifice. There was no need now to make him promise never to do it. She did not even ask for such a promise.

But she spoke openly, as she spoke of other things that belonged to the past, of his thwarted purpose, weaving it into her still noble efforts to inspire him with some little courage to face the inevitable difficulties of existence. She told him that he had come to a turning point. She said that his determination to commit suicide rather than fall back utterly was a proof that his redemption lay within reach. It was cowardly to give up the fight, but nevertheless his self-condemnation had been fine. Bad people, broken-down people, never take their lives because they are ashamed of them, but because they have not the fortitude to continue them.

She tried to inspire him, but she did not offer to assist him.

One evening she was sitting by the open window of her room; and he, standing by it, looking at her, watching her face, and longing to give expression to his thoughts of gratitude to her, of love for her, began stammeringly to speak of their remaining chances of possibilities of comfort. Were they to be together? Could she ever bring herself to trust him again?

"No," she said. "I don't think so." And she asked him to sit beside her, so that they could talk quietly. "I can't stand any more excitement or emotion," she said, as if apologising for the calmness of her tone. "Let us be businesslike. You see, Andrew, I am utterly exhausted. I couldn't help you now, if I tried. And with all my trying till now I have failed, you know." He protested. But she shook her head and continued in the same heartbreaking

manner. "We both tried, Andrew. But I realise that I never did enough. I was weak when you needed strong handling, and when I had any strength it was at the wrong time, and I wearied you."

"No, no."

"Yes, oh, yes. I bored you just when I ought to have stimulated you. I worked you up, but then I let you down. Then the weariness came. I bored you. Yes, old man. It's no use saying no. I bored you stiff. I did try not to, but I wore you out. We wore each other out."

She had said that she could not bear any more emotion, but she was showing every sign of it.

"But, Maggs, you didn't fail. It was I, all the time, always."

"Judge a tree by its fruit. Look at the results. . . . I was the one who set out to do great things. Not you, Andrew. That's why the failure hurts so; why it is so bitter in its taste, and so horrid in its after-taste." And she spoke with intense feeling. "Can you understand that I loved you, yourself, for yourself, because I couldn't help loving you, from the very beginning? . . . But I loved you also because, you were to be my work—my grand task—the purpose that kept me alive, and gave any meaning or sense to my life. You offered me all that, and in return I was to save you. Oh, Andrew, it is a bad day for saviours when they find they've made a mess of it." Again he protested. But she ignored his protestations. "It isn't too late," she urged. "There's plenty of time." And she said in effect that if he was to be saved now, he must save himself. He listened to her in silence. And finally she said that he had better go away by himself and try to work out his redemption. "You can do it. I *know* you can."

He consented to go. He would do anything she wanted. He would not consider his own inclinations or desires. But he asked if he might hope that later on they would be re-united.

She said yes. After a year or so, if he wanted her, she would follow him. And once more her hard matter-of-fact manner changed, and she spoke with strong feeling.

"Don't think me unkind, Andrew. You see I am ready to take the greatest risk—to lose you altogether. It is for your sake. I know it is your best chance."

She talked to Mr. Yardley on his next visit. Could it be managed? Could they get Andrew sent away out of England, and let him work for a livelihood? They need only arrange for his deportation. When arrived at his destination, he must fend for himself. It would be better not to give him money. She did not want him to be a remittance man, but a person fighting for the bare means of subsistence.

"Where," asked Mr. Yardley, "would you suggest—the Colonies?"

"No," she said. "I don't believe in the Colonies—not for him. Sicily. Send him to Sicily. I think he would have his best chance there." And she told Mr. Yardley that many years ago Andrew himself had said an odd thing to her. They were at Taormina—quite happy then—confident, too—with no clouds on their horizon. And all at once he had said, as if with strong conviction, that if he ever came completely to grief he would like to go back to Taormina. He would be able, he said, to get along there. The climate and the place both would suit him.

Mr. Yardley said that all this could certainly be arranged, since Andrew had agreed to banishment.

"And then," he said, repeating the old question, "what will *you* do?"

She said she did not know. She must think.

"Go back to Westmouth?"

"Yes. Go back to mother, I suppose."

Mrs. Dacre had made her an offer. Mrs. Dacre, rising to

the height of the situation, or as she herself thought, handsomely above it, had said that if Margaret separated from her husband, she might return to her old home, and stay there indefinitely. Margaret should have a hundred a year and her keep. What more could any erring daughter expect? What more could any highly-taxed mother attempt to provide? Nothing—except perhaps a few kind words. Mrs. Dacre supplied these too.

I shall be pleased to have you, Mrs. Dacre wrote, in her longish letter to Margaret. *And it shall all be as it was before this string of miseries started. I cannot give you your old room, because this is Mrs. Randall's, and it would be breaking faith with her. In other respects you shall be made to feel quite at home, as if you had never left me.* The rest of the letter dealt with Mrs. Randall's health, which was certainly failing. Mrs. Randall was not the companion that she used to be. *She is getting deaf. And, between you and me, sometimes so stupid and slow of apprehension, that I could scream or slap her. I do hate to have to repeat a sentence twice, and then to be asked what it means.*

Andrew, humbly accepting from his old friend and benefactor a serviceable workmen's set of clothing such as might be worn in any part of the globe, together with a small traveller's box, soon, too, to be given a second or third class steamer ticket to Naples, and anything else absolutely necessary for his journey, begged to postpone departure until Margaret was about to leave the home at Broadstairs, where she had now been established. His request being granted, the date of his sailing from Tilbury was accordingly fixed.

On the day before this date he went down to the Isle of

Thanet to say good-bye to his wife. They talked together in the garden, and she accompanied him a little way on his return to the railway station.

"I shall think of you to-morrow," she said.

"And I shall think of you," he said. "To-morrow, and the day after, and every day. When do you leave here?"

"Not to-morrow. Next day."

"Let me see. Shall I be wallowing in the Bay? Yes . . . we ought to be round the corner by then. Pitching or rolling nicely—perhaps both."

"But you won't mind. You're a good sailor."

"No, I shan't mind. I shan't mind anything—except the thing you know."

"Take care of yourself," she said. "I won't go any farther. Please take care of yourself. There—bless you."

He took her hand, and stood looking at her.

"Margaret! Come with me. Don't let me go alone. Come with me."

"No. Later, in a year or two. When you've settled yourself. If you are sure you want me then."

"I want you now."

"Perhaps. But now and then are very different things . . ."

On the day after this she left the idleness and comfort of the pleasant house by the North Foreland. She could not pretend to be an invalid. She must not subsist any longer on the charity of friends. It was time to face the world again.

George Ryan met her at Victoria Station, and took her to a boarding-house that called itself a private hotel near the Edgware Road. She was to stay here a day or two before going to Westmouth. For, as Mr. Yardley with

great kindness insisted, she ought to buy at least a couple of decent dresses with their accompanying lesser articles of attire in order to present a satisfactory appearance when meeting Mrs. Dacre's shrewdly critical eyes. Margaret accepted the requisite amount of cash, but said it must be the very last of the old man's benefactions

Andrew had sailed. George, driving with her in the taxicab from Victoria, assured her that he was really gone. George had ascertained the fact from Yardley. George said she need not doubt it. George, giving her this information, was genial, lively, smiling with contentment; and he added hopeful or congratulatory anticipations as to her welfare. She was safe now. No one could ever threaten her peace. No, the page was prosperously turned. A closed chapter lay behind her; fresh new leaves invited her to finish the story of her life cheerfully, merrily, in any way she liked. She had gained her freedom. Wonderful word—freedom!

Indeed, that afternoon and on the evening of the next day, George said many things to her. She let him say them, and kept her thoughts to herself. They were sad and heavy enough, these thoughts of hers.

After a wretched sleepless night she spent the morning out of doors, going from one cheap shop to another, staring at the windows, but buying nothing. Late in the afternoon she went out again, but again she returned to the hotel without having made any purchases. It seemed that, solitary and forlorn, she could not go through the ordeal of choosing, trying on, perhaps having to arrange for alterations, and all the rest of it. To get a suitable frock between Praed Street and Oxford Circus should be easy, whatever one's size, shape, individual taste, and yet to her it seemed insuperably difficult. In the evening George Ryan came and would have taken her to a play or cinema, but she said she had not the heart for gaiety.

Again she could not sleep. Nearly all this second night

she was thinking. She thought of the future now, and recoiled in a helpless revolt from its cold, untinted humiliations. Fate—but how cruel and drab a fate! Her pride was broken; yes, but from loss of pride to admitted disgrace is a miserable transition. The bitter cup had been pushed close to her lips and she must drink from it, but she wanted to spit at it. She was to go back to Westmouth, not as she used to dream of doing, bringing a splendid reformed husband with her, showing him off to friends and acquaintances, dazzling that little stupid, scandalous, envious world by her triumph and felicity. She had imagined this visit so often and so clearly, while she was still a young wife, that it was almost as if it had happened. They were to stay at the Imperial Hotel, saunter about in the public eye, go to tea-parties convened in their honour, do some entertaining on their own account, be kind but patronising to everybody, and then go away, back to London, to the great world, leaving the whole town agape. That was how it should have been. And *now!* She was to return as an object of pity, alone, after a shipwrecked marriage, humbled, penniless, a dependent in the dull home that had been half owned by her—to be nice to that old hag Mrs. Randall, to make herself useful to an exacting and unloving mother, to be treated with scant respect by servants that she dared not censure, to walk by herself in Downside Avenue going on household errands and carrying home parcels, to smile when old friends condoled with her—and lastly, oh, heaven and earth, oh, hell and damnation, to stand at the window on the first-floor landing and stare at the unchanged aspect of the house opposite.

But she need not go back. She had an alternative. There was George. George wanted her to go and live with him; he implored her to do it, and believed that he would soon persuade her. He was very persistent. Without question, a possibility. George said that the time had come to face realities. She would never see her husband again. He

would certainly drink himself to death when left to his own devices. But that would take a little while. During the interim he would, with equal certainty, be unfaithful. So that if she did not care to wait for his demise she could divorce him. George would procure the evidence and manage everything for her. Then she and George would be married and live happily ever afterwards.

She thought of George, and went on thinking about him. Great kindness, some solid virtues, good-humour, unselfishness, in old George. Always loyal to her—if not to his friend. A good little fellow, George. Not quite a gentleman, but perhaps none the worse for that. She had had a gentleman. Once Andrew had told her that she ought to take up with George.

Then she thought of Andrew.

The long rolling waters of the Bay had performed their customary disturbing office beneath a harsh grey sky; then the sun began to shine, a balmy air hung upon bright smooth waters, the great ship ploughed its way onward as easily as if it had been the Ritz Hotel sliding along Piccadilly and round into Waterloo Place; robust, suffering matrons came out of stuffy cabins and had breakfast in the fresh air; elderly dyspeptic gentlemen looked less like corpses in their complexion and gave signs of an increasing animation in their manner; slender long-legged young ladies hitherto recumbent on deck-chairs, rose, giggled, and began to walk briskly, telling one another that seven tours of the promenade deck made a mile.

Andrew Lane saw their flesh-tinted stockings and the colour of their knickerbockers as he looked upward from the restricted space of the lower deck where he was lounging among the crowd of humble voyagers. At night the first-class was well enough to dance. Every night now a jazz band composed of ship-stewards insulted the majestic stars and the vast silent dome of heaven with its loud incompetence. In the quarters of the humble one could just hear the ill-regulated strains floating vaguely. They set people whistling and singing. But there was dancing too down there. Somebody had a hospitable gramophone. Three or four couples solemnly twirled and shuffled in the semi-darkness.

"Have a drink?" said a young man at Andrew Lane's elbow.

"No, thank you."

"Oh, yes, just a spot," said the friendly young man.

"Leave him alone," said another young man, confiden-

tially advising. "He's a surly beggar. He never speaks to a soul if he can help it."

In the early hours of a morning that seemed to have been made of fine pearls and molten silver, the rock of Gibraltar towered above them. The low white curve of the shore was like a coral reef as it stretched away past the gardens of Algeciras and on to the old Moorish castle and town of Tarifa. Their ship was close in, but it crept still closer. Passengers of all classes revelled in the interesting sights that were unfolding—sailing barques, oddly-rigged foreign things; battle cruisers, grey, lumpish, awe-inspiring; the pretty white ensign, proud symbol of home and country; native boats and shouting natives with goods to sell, fruit, lace, oriental shawls, rugs, carpets; two tenders steaming slowly to take off mails and passengers.

The ship would stay here only two or three hours, but passengers might go ashore if they wished.

Andrew Lane did not go. He thought of the last time he had passed this way, with Margaret. It was a Sunday morning then. He and she, bustling off in high spirits, had been surprised when they landed to find the town so quiet. They had forgotten Sunday. Very few shops were open, no business was going on. They hired a car and drove about, continually returning over the same ground. Then they had some coffee in a garden above the inner harbour, not because they wanted coffee, but for something to do. It was fun. They were happy. They hadn't begun to be unhappy in those days—he and Maggs.

The mountainous coast-line of Spain was an endless panorama as they sailed northward. The sun shone more fiercely; the air grew still and hot; coatless men and hatless women lay about basking. Nobody wanted to play

games. The sunset hour was incredibly beautiful. At night the stars seemed to come down lower. They hung like clusters of golden lamps from a ceiling of purple velvet.

For the most part of next day land was out of sight. Then on another morning people woke to see a semi-circle of hills, tiny white houses dotted on faintly green slopes, grey islands, a broad town rising from the water's edge. It was the roadstead of Toulon.

The ship dropped anchor far out. They would stay here all day. Very likely they would not get away till after midnight. Everybody might go ashore.

But it was a long dreary business for the humble. They waited and waited while the tenders carried off the well-to-do. Hour after hour passed. Then at last their turn came. A tender had appeared at their end of the ship, and they flocked down into it. It would not take them to the place where the first-class people had landed, near the Customs-houses, with taxi-cabs, hotel omnibuses, and demonstratively attentive porters, but to the public jetty in the middle of the town.

The quay at Toulon, a promenade as well as a place of business, was very gay and bright. Noisy pinnaces from the warships landed sailors and embarked visitors. Bugle-calls sounded cheerily. Naval officers in uniform passed with an air of importance, or paused, saluted, and chatted with female friends. A sauntering crowd drifted to and fro in front of the shops and restaurants that faced the jetty. Sun awnings covered the space before the cafés, and nearly all the chairs and tables arranged in the pleasant shade were occupied.

A woman seated alone at one of these tables excused herself to a pestering waiter for not ordering anything

further. She had drunk some black coffee in a tall glass, and the waiter seemed to think that this barely justified a protracted use of a chair. She was not bad-looking, neatly dressed, but perhaps her appearance gave the waiter a suggestion of poverty.

An elderly man spoke to her, and would have been amiable and friendly, but he found her entirely lacking in conversation. Time passed, and she was still sitting there. She had been there a long while. But she got up when the Orient Line tender approached, and, as if abandoning her chair for good, went across the flag stones to the jetty entrance. She stood there waiting.

In the throng of humble folk Lane came slouchingly, almost with his old gait of the bad times.

"Margaret!"

"Yes, it's I, Andrew . . . Are you glad to see me—or sorry?"

He embraced her. He held her against him, moving a step or two with his arm still round her shoulders. All the sightseers from the ship were going on. In a minute they were by themselves.

"You are coming with me?"

"Oh, yes," she said disconsolately. "If you still want me—if you haven't changed your mind."

His hands were shaking, his arm dropped. Then he spoke with an emotion that was dreadful to see.

"Margaret, I swear to God I'll not fail you this time. Yes. God strike me blind and imbecile, make me a torment to myself and a horror to all others, if I ever let you down after this."

"Don't be blasphemous—and silly," she said. "Talk business."

"You'll come back to the ship with me?"

"I don't think I can. I've scarcely any money—not enough for the ticket. You had better come off here. Can you get your things sent off?"

"They aren't much. If I don't see them again I shan't mind."

"No. You'd better get them."

They went along the jetty towards the tender, looking for a ship's officer.

"Listen," she said, exactly in the old way. So many times she had said the word, reproving him, cheering him, putting heart into him, and more than once he had asked her not to say it, to cure herself of the trick. "Listen. We may do as well here as there. We both talk French, and we don't talk Italian. It may be easier. And the climate is just as good."

They went to the British Vice-Consul and asked if he could find them any sort of work. He sent them to a mixed farm in a valley thirty miles away.

Along one of the upper terraces, beneath the orange and cherry trees, there was whiteness and colour that looked at a little distance like a drift of snow on which confetti had been profusely scattered, with here and there fragments of amethyst gauze. These were the sweet peas, now ready for market, and being hurriedly gathered and packed. From end to end of the long rows of blossom about half a dozen girls and a couple of lads showed their bent backs and quickly moving hands. A wooden box on the ground beside each worker was soon filled and left. Then an empty box was pulled forward. Busy as bees, the pickers never raised their heads or looked round, but they talked to one another. Chatter, laughter, snatches of song might be permitted, if there was no cessation of work. Even the woman in charge, who might have taken things easier, was working steadily.

The sun, nearing the zenith, streamed down in fire and heat. The high blue sky was cloudless. But the wind had backed to the wrong quarter. There was a menace if not a danger of the one enemy that is feared in Provence, and more particularly during the months of April and May—rain. A storm, creeping insidious yet fatal out of the east, and then bursting over the hill tops in a torrential downpour, might devastate these terraces and in two minutes render the whole spring-tide growth an ugly and valueless ruin. So all the open-air and unprotected flowers on the place were to be got away before nightfall. Gabelle, the intendant, had said it. Already the carter had taken down two waggon-loads to the railway station. He would be carting all the afternoon.

Suddenly a whistle sounded in a shrill thin piping. In-

stantly the work stopped. The mid-day rest had come.

The whistle had been blown by the woman who was supervising. She rose, straightened herself, and stretched her arms. She was a strong healthy-looking creature, quick of movement, easy of gesture, with a rather attractive aspect in her peasant costume and rough straw bonnet; her eyes bright in its shade, her white teeth shining, her cheeks and neck deeply browned by the sun. She went among the girls, laughing and talking with them as they picked up the overflowing boxes and carried them away towards the mass of buildings behind the highest terrace.

Presently she came swinging down a stone causeway to where a conduit of water led into a big brick tank, and kneeling she rolled up her sleeves and washed her face and hands in the running water. Then she went up again, and, standing above a buttressed wall in the shade of an olive tree, looked out at a corner of the high road and the beginning of the lane or track that gave access to the farm lands.

She soon saw what she expected. Two figures appeared. A young girl carrying a basket in one hand and leading a small pinafored child with the other had entered the lane. This was a daily practice. The woman was being brought her dinner and her daughter. She raised her voice loudly and gaily.

"Come quick. Don't keep me waiting."

The child left its guardian, ran to her, and was kissed and hugged. An intelligent imp of three, she hopped up and down, while the young servant-maid undid the basket, and prattlingly told her mother all the news. Her baby brother was asleep in his cot and they had put the dog out of the room before they shut the door. She had seen father with the horses. Father said he was coming now. A cow had sat down in the road. But it got up again. . . .

"Mother, mother! There's father;" and the child ran off to meet him.

He lifted her up, kissed her, lifted her again, above his head this time, and she shouted joyously. Then they came on hand in hand. He was a dark, sunburnt man, grey-haired, thin, but muscular and vigorous, seeming not old or young, dressed in colourless clothes, faded leather gaiters, and big hob-nailed boots—looking all that one would expect to see in a horse-keeper or head carter on a large and fairly prosperous estate.

The peasant girl, their servant, left them, and the family party sat upon the ground by the biggest and oldest of the olive trees, and had their meal. It consisted of bread, cheese, fruit, with a bottle of light red wine for the parents and a bottle of milk and water for their little girl. They ate heartily and talked very little.

"Will it rain?" said the woman.

"No," said the man. "Not for a week. It is old Gabelle's fancy. He dreams of rain. It has been his nightmare for sixty years."

"He was cross just now. But I smoothed him over."

"Oh, he's all right. We know his bark is worse than his bite."

"He hasn't got a bite nowadays"; and the woman laughed. "He has done biting. But he bit us hard enough once, didn't he?"

"He's all right. . . ."

After a time the peasant girl returned, carrying a more precious burden. This too was a usual rite. The baby boy wrapped in a shawl was being brought for the mother to feast her eyes on his tiny face and immature limbs before she resumed her work. She took him from the girl with tender care, laid him on her lap, and crowed over him. The man changed his position, came and knelt beside her and, snapping his fingers and chirping, joined in the adoration.

Then presently the girl took both children away with her. The man sat with his back against the gnarled trunk

of the olive tree and lit a cigarette. The woman sat near him, looking out with contented eyes at the wide peaceful landscape that had become as intimately familiar to her as if she had been born within its view and had lived here all her life.

This was the climax of their hour's delicious rest. Ten more minutes in which nothing need disturb them. Gabelle, the bailiff or intendant, an old man of seventy but indomitably active, walked up the lane with long quick strides, and stopping talked to them. They did not move. Old Gabelle said he was pleased that the rain had kept off.

"But we shall have it to-night. A deluge."

"Think so? I wonder."

Then the proprietor, riding a white horse, came below the wall and spoke to them. Again they did not stir. They answered him lazily, drowsily. He had only one rein to the bridle, and that was a piece of cord, but he carried a long twig of hazel, and with the gentle switch and the sound of his voice he made the horse go wherever he wanted. He rode away talking to the horse, and the restful silence beneath the olive tree was unbroken for a little while.

"Margaret! Are you awake?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"How goes the time?"

"Three more minutes," she said, after looking at her wrist watch.

"Ah!" Andrew Lane gave a gentle little sigh and closed his eyes.

But Margaret continued to look at the view.

Great hills on either side shut in the valley, as if wanting to hide it or to preserve it from change for all eternity. Pine-clad at their base, they rose bare and rugged above the dark foliage, and behind them were higher peaks of shining rock, with fantastic craggy walls and vast rifts in their tremendous flanks. Here, close beneath her, in the home land, the ground sank rapidly below the terraced

part, and made a nobly extensive plateau on which the olives, the vines, the corn, with their hardier flowers and vegetables, could be cultivated as easily as inexpensively. Grey, yellow, and brown, it glowed softly in the noontide heat and seemed to speak to her of safety and of peace. Then beyond the confines of the farm territory the valley fell and opened, and ceased to be a valley at all. A vast flat plain succeeded it. Maplike, faint of colour, with softest and most delicate green for its fields and cream and ochre patches for its homesteads and villages, the level expanse spread itself out, stretching almost as far as the eye could reach. But not quite as far. Beyond this plain there was another, twenty miles away from where Margaret was sitting, the sea. She could see it, she could think of it—the wide, deep, tideless sea. And it was no wider than her own happiness, no deeper than her tranquil joy.

They had made good. This was the hackneyed but comprehensive term used by the vice-consul, despatching them to the farm and hamlet of Valdour-l'Abbaye, and being asked by Margaret how long their employment would probably last. "For ever," he said, "if you make good;" and he told them that able-bodied and industrious people were becoming scarcer on the land every day. In Provence, as everywhere else, the lure of the towns grew more and more potent. Hearty young boys and girls, only submitting to parental authority until they were of age to defy it, left the fields and vineyards in hundreds, in thousands, to enter factories, shops, hotels, to do anything rather than go on digging and delving as their ancestors had done contentedly for many generations.

Andrew and Margaret had soon ceased to fear an early dismissal at Valdour-l'Abbaye. They had made good. But the work was very severe. They laboured, both of them, in the sweat of their brows, as common farm hands among

people who are traditionally made to work harder than beasts of burden and sometimes are worn out sooner. Men and women of fifty here were old. Moreover they had a hard taskmaster, for the owner was an absentee and his bailiff or factor possessed a full authority to govern in his absence.

They had to fight, too, against the prejudice of fellow-workers. They were foreigners. It was a crime difficult to live down. They did not at first understand that they were subject to traditional hatred and suspicion, not because they were English, but because they were alien to Provence. All outsiders carried the same disgrace of not belonging. The Englishman, German, or Spaniard was detested no more and no less than the native of Normandy, Touraine, or Burgundy.

After a year, however, they were adopted; but till then, they had not heard a single friendly word or seen one smile that was intended for them.

But meantime Gabelle, that stiff, remorseless old man, the servant acting as master, had cast an approving eye upon them. Long before the owner returned they had risen from the ranks, and without receiving much more pay were performing duties of a higher class.

Andrew, clever with horses, became second carter, then head carter. Margaret used to go to Gabelle's little office in the great farmyard and help him with his accounts. And she was sent into the owner's house sometimes to clean the rooms and dust the furniture.

Time passed. At last Monsieur Paul Valdour, the lord and master, appeared on the scene; not to stay permanently as Gabelle had hoped, but to look round and refresh himself for a few weeks in his natal air. After this visit of Monsieur Valdour all things became easier for "Monsieur and Madame Lanne," as he called them. No doubt he had received good reports of their capabilities and willingness.

Rooms and lofts in the castle-like building above the cart-sheds were cleared out, distempered, and generally put in order for them. Some odd bits of furniture were lent from the house. They had been thus provided now with a real home of their own, to improve and embellish as they pleased. Andrew was entrusted with some affairs of management. He took produce to Cannes and Toulon for sale, and made all the railway despatches from the not distant station at St. Christophe. He drove the big motor lorry, a relic of the war, a noisy lumbering vehicle that in a less frugal land would long since have been allowed to fall to pieces, as it was always trying to do. Occasionally also he acted as chauffeur to the private car, driving Monsieur Valdour into Nice and fetching him back again next day. But ordinarily Monsieur sat at the wheel himself. Then he would have Andrew at his side and talk to him freely.

He asked no questions, but with a fine courtesy showed them at once his recognition of the fact that they were gentlefolk. They had descended. They worked for a livelihood. Their family concerns were not his business. These things happen. In former times his own family were noble; now he and the last two or three generations were yeomen. One does not boast of past glory or look down on present mediocrity. Nevertheless, if anybody were interested, he could tell them of the Valdours of Valdour-l'Abbaye. Witness the territorial designation! Oh, but yes, barons, counts, princes, little kings, if you cared to lift the veil and go back with him into the mists.

Before he left for Paris he gave instructions that the Lannes were to have more money as wages.

They were rich. They could save. When their hoard grew larger they would seize the first chance of transport that occurred on a Sunday, go down to Nice, and buy themselves some clothes. Hitherto they had only been able to get clothes for the children, and these had been obtained at the little town half a mile away on the mountain road.

Lucky, highly-favoured people. But still the work was very hard. It never ceased. In this happy land, where winter is only a name, agriculture knows no holidays. Unlike the hard northern countries, where for weeks at a time field work is impossible, here there was always something to do. At every season of the year open-air labour had only the brief interruptions caused by that ever-dreaded enemy, the rain. Except when her children were born, Margaret had no week-day respite. The longed for rest of the Sundays was just sufficient to restore her energy and set her going again.

There was little talk and no time for ennui in their evenings. They lay down and slept as soon as possible after the day's work was done. They rose at dawn or before it.

Margaret, while she dressed herself, looked out of her window at the roofs of scattered cottages beside a broad white road, a deep ravine spanned by a single arch of stone where the road made an abrupt turn towards the town, ash-grey olive trees, golden oranges on smooth-leaved branches that carried the blossom as well as the fruit, neglected roses running wild in an old garden border, and the dark silent woodlands; and except for a few friendly and familiar signs she might have thought that all the world was still sleeping. But there was a perfume of wood fires in the fresh cool air, smoke rose from the nearest cottage, a clatter of feet in wooden shoes echoed from the walls of the great barns and stables behind her dwelling-place, a dog barked, cows lowed plaintively, impatient for the milking. Another day had begun.

She watched its new light and lingered at the window, her eyes filled with beauty, her heart with gratitude. The sun had touched the rocky tops of the hills and its rays seemed to creep downward, sweeping away with fiery splendour the purple gloom and black shadows of the pine-clad slopes. Soon it would embrace half the globe. For this same sun was rising upon all things that in her life she had

looked at from other windows; the smug respectable unloveliness of an English seaside town, the drab squares and gardens of Bloomsbury, the mean poverty-stricken houses of Westbourne Park, the squalid misery of Shepherd's Bush.

Why remember the narrow streets, the sordid thoughts, the pain, the shame, the horror that for her had been but were no more? She did not think of them, except as things utterly gone, a darkness as of night, the prelude of this glorious morning.

Andrew was already out. When he came back from the stables, the hot coffee and milk, the bread and butter, were all ready. They had breakfast and went to their work.

She did not mind the work. She loved it and blessed it. It had been their salvation. She could have knelt and kissed the kindly soil in gratitude. Her thoughts as she walked by her husband's side were peaceful prayers and her smiles fervent thanksgivings. She had sown and she was reaping. She had given and he was repaying. Andrew, the new Andrew, the real Andrew, was hers at last. He had lifted himself from that cruel realm of degradation and fear. He was immeasurably high above the old, bad, vice-distorted Andrew; and he would rise higher still, and higher.

Monsieur Paul was coming home for good. Although fifty years of age, he was still spoken of as "Monsieur Paul" by all the older people on the place. Yes—Valdour of Valdour-l'Abbaye had made up his mind to settle down in the home that had been his only in theory and not in practice. "I am of Provence by birth, but of Paris by inclination." He had said this to the Lanes during that first glimpse of him. He said it to everybody. Old Gabelle used to twitch his wrinkled face and mutter in respectful disapprobation when Monsieur Paul said it to him.

Valdour-l'Abbaye. A pretty name, Margaret always considered. It was said to have been really an abbey, and in the foundations of the buildings in the big yard archæologists professed to discover traces of a fine abbey church. There were also, it was said, indications of a monastic establishment further up the hill, beyond the row of tall cypress trees that shielded everything from the north wind. The one indubitable evidence of an ecclesiastical character was the stone cloister or roofed passage that connected the farm buildings with the owner's house. The house was quite modern, not more than a hundred years old; a simply-planned but pleasant house, wide and low, with only two floors in it. Margaret assisted in getting it ready for occupation. Two servants had been engaged. All the green shutters were thrown back against the yellow-washed walls. The sun streamed into the shadowy rooms, making the dull old furniture shine.

Margaret thought that with a little trouble and expense it might be made very charming. But it was doubtful if Monsieur Valdour would make any changes. The three living-rooms on the ground floor opened one into another. The largest of them could have been converted into a delightful library. Perhaps Monsieur Paul would do as much as this. They said that he was bringing all his books. Monsieur Paul had a reputation for taste in literature.

His history, as Margaret gathered from all the talk of Gabelle and the others, was simple enough. He had been the only son of a very old-fashioned father. After his military service he stayed away. He wanted to be a poet, and to write books and plays; and having been rendered independent by an inheritance from his mother, he could afford to indulge this ridiculous inclination. Then the father, after some years, peremptorily summoned him. With the filial obedience of the French he submitted himself, obeying all orders, and becoming a farmer and nothing else. An order came to marry, and he obeyed that too. The wife

chosen for him was the daughter of another old-fashioned proprietor. He lived with her under the parental roof, and she grew fat and ill—so much so, that he finally obtained release from his labours for the purpose of taking her away and getting her special treatment. She died. Then he said he was too heart-broken to return. The place would be too full of tender memories. Apparently nothing could restore him and console him, for he stayed away until his father lay on a death-bed. Again filial, he flew to Marseilles in a special aëroplane, and came on by road in a racing car at one hundred and fifty kilometres an hour. He was just in time. "Thank Heaven," he said to Gabelle, "that I have mercifully been permitted to get here in time to close my father's eyes."

Then he went away again.

Now he returned, as he assured everybody, with the full intention of settling quietly amidst the olives and vines of his adorable country and there ending his days. A little tired perhaps both of intellectual pleasures and the hectic amusements of great cities, he spoke with enthusiasm of an unexciting but healthy future. No further follies for him at his age, he said, perhaps hinting at other dissipations. He felt it was good, good, oh, so good, to be done with all that.

His personal appearance was pleasant. He was a tall man with the black stiff hair proper to his lineage, and a strong frame that seemed to have altogether escaped the tendency to corpulence that too often disfigures the middle-aged Provençal. His rather prominent eyes had a soft, kindly expression, and his manner was always gentle, even deprecating, never authoritative or dictatorial. He took the utmost care in regard to his costume, and had brought with him a large wardrobe containing garments suitable, at least in his own opinion, for every possible emergency. There was a studied foppishness about the rough-and-

ready costume that he had devised for use on the farm itself—huge drooping hat, shirt with immense collar open at the neck, loose light-coloured jacket, red sash tightly bound about his waist and holding up dark brown or navy-blue trousers. His attire for sport, as when he went up into the hills by himself to shoot blackbirds, or when he joined a large party of friends to hunt the wild boar, was really terrific, and yet, as he declared, strictly correct and orthodox. On Sundays, for Mass, which he regularly attended, he wore with much complacency the complete outfit of a boulevardier, a man of the world, fashionable coat, waistcoat, and trousers to match, grey Homburg hat, stiff collar, vivid tie, very narrow, pointed, brown shoes.

"Now I am of the city, am I not?" he said, stopping to chat with Mr. and Mrs. Lane by the bridge on his way back from church. "Metamorphosed again! If a magician picked me up and dropped me in the Champs Elysées or the Rue de Rivoli nobody would stare at me. I should be but a Parisian among other Parisians. Here it is different. I go to change my clothes for the rest of the day."

He liked talking to Andrew of the gay world, not only as he had known it for so long in Paris, but during more brief experiences in London.

And he talked much to both of them about Provence, the worship of the soil, and so on. Holding forth thus, he displayed a strong enthusiasm that yet curiously was not devoid of at least a suggestion of weariness. He seemed occasionally as if merely reciting things that he had learnt by heart. As Andrew said, he was sometimes like a man talking in his sleep.

"With us it is religion—the adoration of the country. Our very Saints are Provençals. The road to Heaven for us is through our dear woods, and upward by the rushing

torrents of our mountain streams," and he stifled a yawn. "Madame Lanne, you too, will learn to love it."

"But I have already, monsieur."

Naturally, unavoidably, he was not long before he spoke of Mistral. "There is the voice of our land. I, too, have wished to be a poet. Poetry is in our blood, a strong and savage music set to the tune of our quick-beating hearts—like the wind blowing. The mistral! Have you heard of that wind-name and how it was his, too, the poet's?"

"Yes, you told me."

"Oh, I have told you. There is so much I could tell you. And I will lend you books. Have you read *Maurin des Maures?* Ah, that is an epic. Daudet as well! *Lettres de mon Moulin*. That, of course, you have read. It is taught in your schools, is it not? Madame Lanne, all my books are at your disposal—many volumes of pictures also—and the cabinet of coins collected by my father!"

Thus he ran on—telling them of Roman coins and medals that had been dug up on this very farm only a few years ago; of olive trees fifteen hundred or two thousand years old, still vigorous and fruit-bearing, trees that Roman soldiers, halting on the march, had sat under; of a mountain town, within easy reach, that had been a free republic down to the beginning of Louis the Fourteenth's reign. "Ah, yes, it is all intensely interesting," and he yawned outright.

Andrew laughed. Andrew had soon seen through this sham enthusiasm. But it was an amiable pretence. The good man was merely putting into words the thoughts that he knew he ought to entertain, but did not. The frequent repetition of the words might establish the thoughts themselves some day.

"Yes, indeed, a grand country," said Monsieur Paul, gentle and courteous, but looking at Andrew with mild defiance in his eye. "Do not doubt. A glorious land. Proud may one be to say 'This piece of it is mine. It has given me

life and I shall go into it again at death' . . . Ah, yes. But, oh, my friends, I am lonely. Intercourse with you is a boon to a very lonely man."

This was their lord and master.

Whether bored or not, he remained on his ancestral land, proving himself to be kind and considerate to everyone, and most particularly to those adopted foreigners, the Lanes. He made Gabelle pay them better and better. Every month he tried to add some amenities to their home and to enhance their position in the scheme of the estate.

In the intercourse that he had been good enough to say he valued, he was friendly and open-hearted to Andrew, and very complimentary to Margaret. He praised her industry, her cleverness, her looks. If she had not been burned almost black by the sun he would have made her blush. Till now only one person had ever paid her such high-flown compliments.

She waved away these polite attentions, or with a laugh accused him of insincerity. He should not endeavour to turn the heads of his employees. Even in kindness he ought not to say anything that he did not mean.

It was not difficult to answer him lightly and gaily, until there came an altogether unexpected little episode.

He had sent for her one afternoon to do something in the house, and while she was there he mentioned how much more she could do for him if she chose. He was lonely. And she too, oh, she must often be very lonely; for instance, when her husband was away with the vans, and she knew he could not return for many hours. At such times how pleasant if she would come up here. They would kill *ennui*, she and Monsieur Paul. Still further he could not see why, assuming that their friendly relations took on this auspicious modification, she should not come and live at the house altogether. She could be housekeeper, secretary,

what you will, and it would be no longer necessary for her to undertake any heavy toil. There was ample room here to lodge Monsieur Lanne and the sweet children also. All this would be very convenient, as well as pleasant.

He threw out these suggestions—or made his dishonourable proposals, as they might have been described in old-world English—with engaging smiles and a completely light-hearted manner. He was like a person talking about business, an agreeable bit of business, candidly and reasonably. He refrained from taking her hand or attempting any warmer caresses, as an Englishman would have done. He did not come an inch nearer to her. It was all perfectly natural and easy.

She did not feel insulted, but she was greatly worried by it. She had made it very plain that she could never accept the task of banishing his loneliness, and she did not know what might be the after-effects of her refusal. Saying nothing about it to Andrew, she waited on events with a good deal of trepidation.

Monsieur Paul did not bear malice, or show the slightest resentment. He was as kind as ever. More so. He often alluded, however, in a flagrantly unbashful manner, to his frustrated hopes, saying that hers was a severe character and that she lacked the elemental virtue of pity. But he went not infrequently to Nice, and in that large market of amusement and frivolity it was probable that he could find people to take pity on him and console him temporarily for all rebuffs. Margaret hoped that it was so.

At any rate her apprehensions were allayed and even her embarrassment disappeared, so that she could feel again quite at her ease with the unfailingly kind employer.

When he saw her busily engaged as he rode about the farm, he would come to her, order the old white horse to halt, and, taking off his enormous hat with a gesture as dignified as could have been used by any of his princely forbears, spend a few minutes in amiable chat.

"Madame Lanne! You work too hard. Positively it makes my bones ache, and also my heart, to see you working so. And yet it is not necessary." As he said this he was both arch and plaintive. "I have shown you that from you no work need be asked."

Margaret laughed. It was a hearty open-air laugh, and she looked at him with confident eyes. She spoke to him as to a real friend who deserved her respect and affection.

"Idleness wouldn't be good for me, Monsieur Paul. It isn't good for anybody. Why don't you take off that smart new jacket and do a little work yourself?"

"Ah, cruel," he said. "Very cruel," and he flicked the horse's neck. "Forward, faithful comrade," and, riding away, he talked to the horse. "People are cold and severe. They have no pity. So nice to look at, but of marble inside, of granite, as obdurate and unyielding."

In the unchanging routine of life on the farm, time went fast. Margaret, the younger, was five years old, and the small Andrew three. They were strong, healthy children, giving their adoring parents little trouble and no anxiety.

For several months when Gabelle fell ill with rheumatism, Andrew was in charge of everything. He had gradually learnt some patois and could talk the talk of these people that were now placed under him. They worked for him cheerfully. They liked him and were never envious. It seemed to them an obvious conclusion that when old Gabelle retired the Englishman would be his successor.

Andrew often talked to Margaret of the bad farming that still prevailed. So many antiquated and childish methods had been handed down from the age of ignorance. He spoke of the things he would like to alter and improve if ever he were given full authority. He thought about the

land just as she had thought about the house. Improvements would be so easy.

And all this time Valdour, the actual but amiably careless lord of the domain, had been nicer and nicer to them. They had immense comfort in his kind friendship. It gave them the feeling that they were absolutely safe. Whatever happened he would never part with them.

He was away often, spending now a week, now a fortnight, at Nice. But he was always the same on his return. Nothing changed him or spoilt him.

After one of his absences he asked them to dine with him at Nice on the following Sunday. They were shy of going because of the difficulty in regard to dress; but he said that on Sunday nobody wore "grand toilet." The friends that he wished them to meet would certainly be in morning dress.

They went with him. His dinner party was given at the marvellous new casino, of which the Babylonian grandeurs, the brilliant lighting, the cubist effects of the cunningly-disposed mirrors, and everything else, surpassed belief. Crowded tables, noise, music, dancing, a cabaret show while they were still eating and drinking—it made Margaret gasp and blink after the quiet and seclusion of the valley farm. She laughed, applauded, praised. But one of the guests, a Mademoiselle Gineste, said it was a rotten show, and the attentive, kindly host looked crestfallen on hearing this adverse verdict. The girl's mother, Madame Gineste, was more polite, thanking him effusively for the entertainment, and saying that Sidonie ought to be smacked. Sidonie, she said, was never satisfied. The only other guest was a young male cousin of these Ginestes.

Margaret thought them a very inferior, common, middle-class family, and she thoroughly agreed that Sidonie deserved smacking.

Before the evening was over she felt this even more strongly. The girl gave herself airs. She tried to snub the

Lanes, as well as the too gentle and attentive Monsieur Paul. Not really pretty, dark and red, with big eyes and an Italian skin, she was robust and yet lackadaisical. Margaret watched her dancing with Monsieur Paul. Full-bosomed, broad of hips, she hopped and pranced on strong calves and firm ankles, while she cast languishing glances round his shoulder.A minx? But she might be seductive in a common, tawdry, highly-coloured way. She might be the cheap, gay toy that men foolishly want—just as silly children often crave for something futile and useless when offered their choice in a lamp-lit bazaar.

Monsieur Paul took the Ginestes to their hotel, and then came back to the casino to pick up the Lanes.

He asked Andrew to drive the car and to let him sit behind with Margaret. He wished to talk to Madame Lanne. But it was a long time before he said anything of importance. They had left the lights of Nice far behind them. They were speeding on into the starlit night, upward among the quiet hills. Then he asked Madame Lane to tell him what she thought of Sidonie Gineste. Even if she had not been on her guard, something in his tone would undoubtedly have warned Margaret to be careful. Indeed it changed suspicion to certainty. She said that Mademoiselle Gineste was charming.

"That is the word," he said. "Charming! She is going to be my wife."

Alone in their rooms, Andrew and Margaret looked at each other and laughed ruefully.

"Bad news, old girl."

"Oh, why? We mustn't think so."

"I do think so. It may make a lot of difference to us."

All over the farm, when the news was made known, men and women were saying the same thing. How would it affect them? An unmarried man is nearly always a good

master; but a widower with a young wife is an incalculable proposition. They knew that the lady was young, because he had told them so. "But, yes, young, and very, very beautiful."

No delay occurred. While doubts were fresh in people's minds the marriage was solemnised, and the happy pair entered into residence at Valdour-l'Abbaye. Curiously enough, Madame had declined to have any alterations made at the house. The rooms could remain as they were, unpainted, undecorated, faded and rather shabby. She would not allow even another servant to be engaged.

For a little while, but not for long, everything seemed to be going well. Monsieur Paul was radiant. Dressed in his best rural attire, he used to appear during the mid-day rest, smiling, nodding, calling out gaily, with a protective arm round his bride's waist, as she, in silver shoes and high heels, a bright red parasol over her black head, came gingerly down the stone steps from terrace to terrace. He talked of his felicity with a gloating satisfaction that was embarrassing.

Then soon all changed. Monsieur Paul's prominent eyes swam in occasional sadness. He strolled about alone, gloomily. One day he sought Margaret in the lower fields, and drawing her aside spoke confidentially.

"My wife," he said, "is not happy. It is a disappointment for me. Of course, I shall take her away when I can, and not imprison her here always. But meanwhile I wish you would be her friend."

"I have tried to be—but she wouldn't have it"; and Margaret reminded him, that when he had insisted on her going to the house for afternoon tea, Madame had been as cold and unwelcoming as the ordinary laws of courtesy permitted.

"Yes," he said. "But do you not guess why? She is jealous of you. She thinks that you have been my mistress,

and that you may be again"; and he asked Margaret to tell Madame that this was not a correct assumption.

"Oh, good gracious!" said Margaret, amused. "Why don't you tell her yourself?"

"I have done so, but she does not believe. After all, that is natural. For would I not have said it in any case? But a word from you will suffice. Women cannot deceive one another in such affairs."

He continued urgently to beg for Margaret's aid. "If she had you for a friend, she would settle down and be more contented. Otherwise she will have her way, and I must travel again. It is not what I now wish. I have taken a wife to be comfortable here myself. I cannot afford the outlay of travel. And again, to the married the life of cities is by no means the same pleasure as to the bachelor."

Margaret complied with his request.

She had little difficulty in removing the stupid girl's suspicions. And with these dissipated she was made welcome. Madame became effusive and affectionate. But she was a completely silly person, and Margaret augured ill for poor Monsieur Paul's immediate and future peace. There could be no doubt as to where he had got that phrase about imprisonment; for the girl at once spoke of herself as a caged bird, an unwilling captive, and so on. She said that the notion of being buried alive here was absurd. Not for that had she, a young girl, married a man old enough to be her father. She, too, was of Provence, but she frankly detested it.

"Dear friend, can I in reason be expected to forego all fun, all adventure, all life, at my age? To speak truth I have never for a moment so intended"; and looking with contempt at the faded furniture of the *salon*, the shabby old curtains, and the cracked and darkened ceilings, she explained why she had refused to have any money wasted

on redecoration. Never, never, had she proposed to make the place her home.

Within a month she had taken Monsieur Paul away, and to stay away indefinitely. In the hour of departure he spoke with sadness to the Lanes. And he wrote to them once from Paris.

Then the blow fell. Valdour-l'Abbaye was to be sold. A lawyer, a surveyor, and a house agent came up from Nice to make schedules, plans, and so forth. Soon two great boards, one at the bend near the bridge and the other lower down the high road, announced to all passers-by the offer of the domain to any willing purchaser.

The only hope left to the people of the farm, a hope expressed by Gabelle, was that no purchaser would be found. Gabelle thought that Monsieur Paul and his advisers were opening their mouths too widely. The price asked, considerably over a million francs, appeared to him as fanciful, exorbitant, unattainable.

"One can never know," said Andrew despondently. "About twelve thousand pounds of English money! Some rich man would give it if he wanted to build an infernal villa. That's what they're doing all along the coast."

"Yes, but we are far from the sea," said Gabelle, still hopefully.

The house agent told them he had no doubt of effecting a sale. The price was reasonable and he trusted that the owner would stand out for it. He need not be in a hurry. It was the autumn now. Let the winter go by and the spring come again. The agent intended to advertise freely in American newspapers. All men are rich in America. An American would buy a place like this by cable without seeing it, without being sure that he wanted it, merely because its advertisement took his fancy.

Gabelle's hopes waned during the winter.

He dreaded now that Monsieur Paul would let the place go for anything that it could fetch. Monsieur Paul, too evidently, was short of money. He had sent orders that all outlay should be cut down. There were many dismissals. It was pathetic, dreadful, to see labourers and their families leaving. Or sometimes the person banished was one of the women. She stood waiting with all her belongings in a wooden box by the side of the road until the loaded lorry came to give her a lift. She clambered up into the back of it, mopped her eyes with a coloured handkerchief, and then waved her hand in farewell as the thing rumbled off. The girls too! Two or three of them went at a time, walking, carrying all they possessed in bundles. As they trudged down the white, dusty road they looked like helpless children cast out upon the world by unnatural parents.

Visitors came, sent by the agent, and Margaret showed them round. They disappeared and others came, but nothing happened. However, there were many rumours. From the agent or somebody else it was learnt that a tradesman at Nice, a draper in a big way of business, would probably acquire the property.

Andrew told Margaret that he felt he could not stay on with strangers, even if they wanted him.

"But where can we go? To begin all over again! Oh, that would be too cruel. And Andrew, the children!"

They confessed to each other that they felt incapable of undergoing the fatigues of an ordeal similar to that which had met them when they first came here. They were no longer physically fit for it. If put to such a test again, they would not make good for the second time. As it was, Andrew said, he sometimes felt desperately tired.

She sighed. "It *is* hard. Six months ago I felt so safe. I felt that we were anchored here."

"Yes, but if they cut our cables—if we have to clear out. . . ."

"Then what would become of us?" she said.

"Well, there's always England. That emerald isle, set like a jewel in the circle of the sea, has not gone under the waves."

"Oh, no," she said apprehensively. "Not England."

His spirits had sunk and they did not rise, although she tried to cheer him. He was restless and unhappy. After his work, in spite of being tired, he went for walks by himself, up the hill paths, among the sombre firs. At night he slept badly. She was sorry for him—and for herself too.

Grey skies, the mistral blowing for days, and then warmth, sunshine, cloudless blue! The deciduous trees had all broken into leaf; the yellow of the budding poplars, the delicious green of the young beech foliage, the umber and gold of the oak, shone out against the grey olives and dark cypresses. Roses, geraniums, wistaria, bloomed together in the neglected garden. The sweet scent of orange-blossom filled the tranquil air. In this glorious spring weather Valdour-l'Abbaye was a lovely place.

But the heart had gone out of it. Fear hung over its vineyards and terraces. The work went on, heavy, listless, without any incentive to effort. These people were here to-day, but they might be gone to-morrow. Gabelle ceased to drive and harry them. Gabelle all at once looked very old and shaky. He moved slowly, with bent shoulders and a vacillating gait.

"READ it," said Andrew, tossing the letter across the table towards her. Then he sat there with his hand against his forehead, so that his eyes were hidden from her. She saw that the blood had rushed upward darkening his sunburnt face. He was breathing fast.

It was after dinner. They had taken the mid-day meal indoors because of a shower of rain, and the letter had been sent across from Gabelle's office in the yard. Their servant brought it. They received very few letters.

This one was written by Mr. Yardley. He had information to give. He said, no doubt they knew—but, in fact they did not know—that Sir Jerome Burnett had died more than six weeks ago. But Mr. Yardley had more than this to tell them. Some time before his death Sir Jerome apparently had forgiven Andrew all those old transgressions. At any rate he had left Andrew some money. By a codicil to the will Andrew was to get a legacy of twenty-five thousand pounds clear of duties. Thus, briefly, but in phrases appropriately leading upwards to the climax, Mr. Yardley broke the news to them.

"Can it be true?" said Margaret in a whisper, refolding the letter, and then immediately opening it again.

"Oh, I suppose it's true enough," said Andrew, with his eyes still shaded. "Too good to be true. And yet true all the same. Yardley wouldn't spoof us."

"How wonderful," she murmured.

"Yes, wonderful. . . . Margaret, I can't think. I feel dizzy—queer. It has knocked me over."

Then presently he got up and stood looking at her. His face was all dark. His eyes seemed as if injected with blood. He was like a man threatened by an apoplectic seizure.

"I must walk," he said. "I must go up into the wood and think. Tell Gabelle I'm gone. He can do without me."

"Yes," she said, "I'll tell him. But let me go with you."

"No, I must go alone. Give me time, I want to think."

She too wanted to think.

After kissing her daughter and son in a sort of ecstasy of rejoicing, telling them they would always have nice bread and butter, saying other enigmatical things which they did not in the least understand, she went down into the fields as usual. But work this afternoon was at first difficult and then impossible. After an hour or two she followed her husband's example and played truant.

She went slowly along the high road, thinking and thinking. As soon as she had crossed the bridge the roofs of the little town came into sight, with the church tower like a lofty column in the midst of them. Its cupola, copper-tiled, was shining, yet dim, all blue and green, with the tints of an old and ruined turquoise.

Beyond the bridge the fir trees fringed the roadway, casting their dark shadows deep into the ravine. She paused and looked upward, thinking of Andrew, excited, overwrought, hiding himself in the green solitude up there while he made his plans for a future that had suddenly been rendered so easy—so perilously easy.

She walked on very slowly. Already her elation had gone. Doubts had begun to oppress her. And her doubts expanding grew into dread, into fear.

She feared as she thought of what Andrew might now wish to do, now that a dead hand had given him liberty and power. Oh, why did the old man leave them such a lot? How much better if he had given them just enough to make the children safe. Two hundred a year—three hundred a

year at the outside—not a pound more! With such an income they could have lived in peace and security. Life was so cheap. They might have taken a cottage and cultivated a bit of ground of their own, with a man to help them, not overworking. It would have been all they could wisely desire. Andrew would have been quite contented to remain here, and thus to the end of his days.

But now he would want to go back to England, and who could say what might happen there? She thought of the old disasters, of the dangers and temptations that would once more assail him. Dared one be sure that he would resist them? Andrew, after these years of privation and toil, let loose in England with a capital of twenty-five thousand pounds, and behaving as if he had an annual income of that amount! The devil's dance might begin all over again.

She strolled on into the town, bought a few household things, and then sat in the public place, still full of troubled thought. She wished that Andrew had allowed her to accompany him. He was climbing the mountain paths. Perhaps now he had come out among the sunlit rocks. He stood there, in the sunlight, shading his eyes. In imagination she could see him. He was breathing fast, overwhelmed not with fatigue but excitement, while he dreamed and planned. As she sat with folded hands, supine, inactive, merely dreading, he was up there deciding her fate.

This central square was really a large platform above a cliff, for the town had originally been placed high on the hill-side at a point best suited for resisting the Saracen invaders. On three sides it was surrounded by buildings, with the church in the middle of the principal side. Plane trees severely trained, a few stone benches, a fountain, and the low retaining wall of the platform, faced it. On the broad steps of the church old men and women often assembled for gossip, and children played there. Now and again its black doors swung open as a figure glided in or

out. The quiet old houses, the steep and narrow streets leading into deep shadows, an archway under which the traffic passed, and a peep of arcades beneath projecting storeys, together made a pleasant little picture. And only pleasant sounds broke the warm drowsy peace of it all—a girl's song as she carried a huge basket of vegetables, the bells of mules drawing a water-cart, the crack of a whip and a man's voice echoing from stone walls, and the melodious notes of the church clock striking the quarters of each uneventful hour.

Margaret, sitting on a bench by the wall, had the farm view of distant plain and more distant sea on which to rest her eyes.

The beauty of it all possessed her. This was her home. She could never have another. April! Oh, to be in England now. . . . But the memory of the verse and the land had no meaning for her. The white hawthorn and the wild hedge-flowers, the sweet English meadows and the smooth broad downs, that she used to love, were nothing, had become nothing to her. England was for others, not for her. It was there that she had suffered. It was here that she had lived in joy.

Presently, unexpectedly, there came disturbance and stupid noise. A party of well-dressed visitors, three women and a man, had unloaded themselves from their car. Silly chatter moved with them as they wandered round the square. They went into the church and swiftly emerged from it. They told one another that the church was cold.

"Yes, *wasn't* it cold? . . . That's how one catches cold. . . . You go out of the warmth into the cold, and, of course, you feel it. . . . *What* a view! . . . Yes, miles and miles! Mother, come and see. . . . I am coming, dear, as fast as I can."

Then they spoke to Margaret, asking her in atrociously bad French whether there was anything else worth looking at. Had the town a history? Was it in any way famous?

She answered in English, telling them a little, but not much.

"Thank you. Then we won't waste our time. But how *well* you speak English!"

"Yes," she said, "I used to talk it quite well. Only now I'm out of practice."

"You haven't forgotten it. . . . Has she, mother?"

The sun was low, and the white road had become grey and dark as she went back. Outside the farm, a small car coming up from the direction of Nice stopped with a jerk and rattle. Her husband got out of it.

"Andrew! I thought you had gone for a tramp in the hills."

"No," he said, "I changed my mind. I went down to Nice instead. Come upstairs, will you?"

Up there she shut the door on the children, and waited, looking at him.

"You like the feeling of being anchored here?"

"Yes," she said, "I did. But it's gone."

"No. You are anchored safe enough now. I have anchored both of us."

Then he told her that he had been to the Nice lawyer and agreed on a price for the whole place. He was buying it in their joint names. Subject to contract, as old Yardley would say, he *had* bought it. The lawyer's acceptance of his offer lay snug in his breast pocket. Here it was for her to see. Yardley must send out a deposit by return of post. Barring accidents—and there would be no accidents—Valdour-l'Abbaye belonged to them.

She need not have feared.

They sat talking late into the night, and were too excited to sleep when they went to bed. In the darkness they continued talking to each other. She spoke of what she would do in the house, and he of what he would do on the

farm. Easy changes, marvellous improvements. . . . Farmers, owners, living on their land . . . Valdour-l'Abbaye. . . . Infinitely too good to be true, and yet true all the same. . . . She need not have been afraid.

At last they both slept.

WHITE-HAIRED, pink of complexion, beautifully and suitably dressed in light grey flannels, a rather grand old man sat at a marqueterie table in a large bedroom writing a letter. It was Mr. Yardley. Two or three more years had passed over his white head without making him perceptibly older or less active. He had spent two nights with the Lanes, and he would be leaving them after luncheon.

My dear Mrs. Dacre,

Margaret was delighted with the excellent account of your health that I was able to give her, and she rejoices in the knowledge that you have so soon filled the gap occasioned by Mrs. Randall's death. She thinks you are to be congratulated on having found such a really nice young woman, who will not only contribute to the household expenses, but look after you and be an agreeable companion into the bargain. She trusts, with me, that this new "partnership" will be a long and prosperous one.

Now, faithful to my promise, I will endeavour to give you an account of everything here.

Andrew is magnificent. He has done wonders with the property, and will no doubt turn it into a very profitable concern as well as what it is at present, a continual source of amusement and interest. His whole heart is in it. He had some trouble with his people at first, when introducing improved methods and modern contrivances. Naturally they liked the old ways best. Is not that so with agriculturists all over the world? Their affection, however, prevailed over their prejudices, and in the end they loyally carried out every change that he wished for. I believe he had completely won them by reinstating a number of men and women who had been discharged by the late owner.

He began by grubbing up every single vine root and replanting with young American vines, all correctly spaced, in the newest and most approved style. The state of affairs had been archaic. He explained to me that the old-fashioned Provençal way was to plant the vines in rows wide apart, with olive trees in the rows, and between the rows corn; all carelessly done, the ground lightly ploughed, the vines badly pruned and running loose. But they liked this. They had a time-honoured Provençal saying that embodied the idea. It was good to sit in your cottage door and see the three things a man needs all growing together—bread, oil, wine. A pretty conceit, but not conducive to up-to-date farming.

Andrew is a mine of information about Provence. If he had lived here all his life he could not know more about it, or have caught the spirit of the country more fully. He reels off facts and legends with amazing gusto. I understand the strength of the spell, for I have been interested in everything he has told me. On this very farm there are olive trees that are probably two thousand years old; it is no unusual thing for the plough even now to throw up Roman medals and coins; and he mentioned a town in the mountains quite near that preserved its liberties as a republic until comparatively recent times.

There is my little sketch of your son-in-law. Think of him as a successful gentleman-farmer, modern, and yet patriarchal, a friend of his people as well as their master, quite the big man of the valley, in his own territory a king. What more can I say of him?

"I have said too much already," thought Mr. Yardley, laying down his pen and smiling to himself. "What does she care about farming—or Andrew either? Silly, selfish old woman! But I swore I would write her a book about it all."

He got out of his comfortable chair and strolled up and down the room. It was as charming a room as he would have occupied in the country house of any of his noble

friends and clients. The carpet of dark violet colour was so thick that his footsteps fell noiselessly. A few delightful old prints on the cream-coloured walls, light curtains of soft silk at the windows, graceful thin-legged chairs together with the deep big sofa-like seats, this beautiful writing table, walnut-wood chests and wardrobes, in the drawers, as he had noticed, little bundles of lavender with their stalks tied up in muslin and ribbon on each unwrinkled sheet of white paper—a charming sweet-smelling room such as only refined delicate-sensed people can plan and maintain!

The voice of the children and then the voice of their mother sounded in the garden.

He went to a window, pushed back a shutter, and let a river of sunshine come flowing into the room. It was pretty down there. The cloister had been restored, its stone shone whitely. From end to end of the terrace transplanted orange trees in double line gave two shady vistas. Immediately below the windows there were flag-stones, but on each side a smooth grass walk ran between borders of flowers. On the flag-stones in the shade of a big sprawling fig tree the luncheon table was being spread by two blue-frocked servants. The children danced round them. Mrs. Lane gave them gentle orders.

He talked to her from his window.

"How long have I before you feed me again?"

"Half an hour. Have they packed your things?"

"Yes, my dear, they have done everything for me. And you'll push me off in good time to catch the train?"

"Yes. Andrew is going to drive you to Nice himself."

"How kind. But are you sure that's not inconvenient?"

"Not a bit. Only we both wish you weren't going. Come down and be with us now."

"Yes, I will, my dear. But I have a letter I want to finish. I have nearly done it."

He closed the shutter, and, dazzled by the sunlight, stood blinking his eyes, unable at once to find his way

back to the table. Presently established there again, he picked up his pen and reflected.

"The children!" he thought. "I had almost forgotten the children." Then he resumed the letter, writing in the same neat businesslike hand, but more rapidly than before.

Naturally you will want to hear about your grandchildren. Well, they are a bonny pair. Vigorous and healthy, they do credit to the air of Provence. The boy seems to be very intelligent and quick of apprehension. Andrew assures me that when he goes about the farm with him he never ceases to ask questions, and all of them to the point. The girl reminds me of her mother at the same age. Like Margaret as a child, she appears to be shy and reserved, rarely speaking unless spoken to; but when she happens to have anything that she wishes to say she says it sharply and eagerly, just as M. used to. One great difference is that she has no pigtail. Her hair is close-cropped. She runs about without a hat, in the shortest possible skirts, with bare arms and neck.

Mr. Yardley gave a little sigh of relief, and braced himself to attack a comprehensive description of the house. This completed, he wound up with swiftness.

Lastly let me set your mind at rest as to your daughter's happiness. Margaret is happy. Margaret tells me that there never was a woman quite as happy as she is. And I believe this is true. She has been her own destiny. She took up a most unlikely adventure and she has made a triumphant success of it. I admire her far more than any words could say. . . .

Joy is a greater, stronger thing than happiness. It was hers too. If in her thoughts she weighed the seeming im-

possibility of the task against the miracle of its full achievement, she might have felt joy as of a god, a creator. She could look at her work and see a man created by her. If ever since life appeared in the universe any human being had succeeded, it was she. She was lonely longing for a mate, a man. Then she saw something broken, damaged, filthy, looking like a man, but not really a man; and she took it into her hands, remade it, gave it thoughts, breathed through and through it a purpose and a hope.

She was waiting for him when he came back after seeing their old friend safely off on his journey. She embraced him. They walked down into the fields. At the sunset hour they were together in the grass walk among the orange trees, and she embraced him again.

"Andrew, I'm so happy . . . Does it bore you when I hug and kiss you like this?"

"Oh, no."

It did not. He loved her. The feel of her face against his, the gentle pressure of her arms, her rough labour-spoilt hands that he was playing with, interlacing the fingers, rubbing their palms, this and every other contact with her body or her spirit communicated peace, comfort, strength. She was the sweet pure fountain that he had drawn life from. He was alive. But for her he would have been dead. And he would have died without tasting life. Better than she, he knew what she had done for him.

DATE DUE

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Maxwell, William Babington,
1866-1938.
To what green altar?

PR 6025 .A93 T6 1930
Maxwell, William Babington,
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To what green altar?
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